

WHITE DESPOT

by

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*. . . Heat explodes
In my dark Siberia.'*

Baudelaire

CONTENTS

PART I

	PAGE
IN SEARCH OF A HERO	I

PART II

THE HERO FOUND AND LOST	87
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PART ONE
IN SEARCH OF A HERO

I HAD known Blaise Cendrars only for a short time But he doesn't take long to make friends, doubtless because he has mixed with so many people of all sorts and conditions He invited me to call on him at Le Tremblay His letter, like all the other letters I received from him later, ended with three words 'My friendly hand'

I went to see him one Sunday He came forward to meet me a thick-set man, with a brick-coloured complexion, shod in clogs and wearing a beret His white Pomeranian, Volga, trotted at his heels

It was cold, and a log fire flared beyond the fireplace An iron table was crowded with a score of potted flowers and plants The lid of a portable typewriter lay on the floor It was covered with labels of Indian and Brazilian hotels

Cendrars went off, and came back with more wood and a bottle of Calvados He cleared away some newspapers and produced cigarettes

A publisher had suggested that he should edit a series of 'lives' of adventurers At this time the slump was only just starting, and nobody took the warnings of the Marxists seriously In publishing, the fashion was all for series, all for 'novelized lives' Writers ransacked dictionaries of biography in the hope of unearthing a grain of glory, a shred of immortality, in one page or another

In the case of many writers, this was merely a pretext for fleeing from the present, which they found unthinkable because they could neither sum it up nor even think about it Everybody chose his subject to suit his self-conceit So-and-so, being a Catholic, lusted after Racine Somebody

else, simply and solely because he was a White Russian, fastened upon Dostoevsky.

Cendrars felt that, where 'lives' were concerned, it was most worth while to narrate those of men who had spent theirs without bothering about books and music. The series he was going to edit was to be called *Hotheads*. The first volume was to be devoted to Al Capone.

Sticking a match-box between the stump of his right arm and his side, Cendrars struck a match and lit a cigarette. Then he suggested that I should write a 'life' of some Russian adventurer. I agreed, in principle.

Cendrars has all a boy's weakness for adventurers: 'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest, Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum'; pirates and slavers and all that sort of thing. But, since he was a boy, he has lived among redskins and travelled in Michael Strogoff's footsteps.

I agreed to his suggestion, as I say. Cendrars laid his one hand, his friendly hand, on my shoulder, and I left him to his typewriter, his dog, and his growing of hyacinths and tulips.

Then I started looking for my Russian adventurer. I consulted books and acquaintances. They displayed before me a chequer-board of monks and bankers, diplomats and double-crossers. I had soon exhausted the list, from Azef to Rasputin. To be sure, at the beginning of the last century there was Fedor Tolstoy, known as 'the American', nailed to Pushkin's complete works by an epigram. Then, just before the War, there was Savin, an Army subaltern who became a famous crook and king of a Pacific island. But they didn't interest me. I was bent on writing about the present.

Then I thought about Ungern.

I asked cautious questions. I learnt nothing, except that everybody knew his name.

'What do you think of the show?' somebody asked me at an exhibition of pictures.

‘Did you ever hear anything about Ungern?’

‘There was a lot of talk about him in Canton at the time when I was there’

‘How’s your brother?’ somebody else asked me, handing me a cup of tea

‘You’ve been in Harbin, haven’t you?’ I replied ‘Did you ever hear the name of Ungern?’

‘Who hasn’t heard it?’

‘My dear comrade,’ I asked somebody else again, ‘you fought in the civil war in Siberia, didn’t you? I suppose you must have met Ungern, eh?’

‘I heard a lot about him, but nothing definite. You see, I did my soldiering in Vladivostok and on the coast’

I couldn’t glean the smallest pointer. There was not even a legend, not even a myth, about Ungern. All I had to go on was a tone of voice here, a shrug of the shoulders there.

I went back to Cendrars empty-handed.

‘I’m going to write a “life” of Ungern,’ I told him.

‘Who’s he?’

‘A White general who fought the Bolsheviks in the Far East and retreated into Mongolia after his side’s defeat’

That was precisely all I knew about Ungern.

SUCH was the start of my pursuit of the man

He kept on escaping me. He confused the catalogues of books in the libraries. He muddled up the addresses of people who had once known him. He afflicted some of them with loss of memory. He struck others dead—for example, 'Prince' Tumbair-Malinovski, who was felled by paralysis and shot himself in a Nice hospital. He allowed no one to identify him.

During the year 1930, that turn-table of prosperity, from Vincennes to the National Library, from the Chinese Legation to Montmartre taverns where Russian taxi-drivers slumped on benches after their night's work, in that Paris where everything was ambiguous and transient, along streets strewn with newspapers and orange-peel, I persisted in following up the trail of a man who had hated and exterminated Bolsheviks ten years before, seven or eight thousand miles away to the east.

One day I went to see a friend of mine. The difference in our ages—he was just twice mine—gave him some authority over me. He took advantage of it to teach me my business in terms so positive that they dismayed me.

'Ungern?' he said. 'Why Ungern, I ask you?' Really, I can't see any interest in him. Why don't you write a 'life' of Stendhal? Have a cigarette. Or, if you don't fancy Stendhal, what about Dostoevsky? A serious study, I mean. In six months you could read up in the National Library everything that has been written about Stendhal. Here's a match.'

'I'm going to write a "life" of Ungern,' I replied smoothly.

'Oh, but you can't, you know! Do you really insist on writing about an adventurer, and a Russian adventurer, too? You do? Then you needn't hesitate. I've got the very man for you. Azef! I'll bet you never thought about him. But he's quite obvious. Just think of the man's life, or rather his different lives: member of the central committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party; *agent-provocatour* of genius; friend of Savinkov the Terrorist and Guerassimov, head of the Okhrana; and who died in Germany like any little provincial tradesman. Paris is bursting with people who knew him.'

'But I haven't yet met anybody who knew Ungern,' I put in persuasively. 'You've talked to me about a friend of yours who lived in Vladivostok during the civil war. Couldn't you write to him?'

'It doesn't matter about Ungern, now that you've chosen Azef.'

'I've chosen Ungern,' said I, diffidently, 'and, if you'd be good enough to write to your friend, you'd be doing me a great service.'

'I'm not going to write to anybody,' he growled. 'No, thanks, not for me. You smoke too much.'

Ten days later he sent me a letter from his friend. By way of marking his disapproval, he did not even enclose his compliments with it. Half-way through, it read as follows:

'I now come to "Bloody Baron Ungern"—for so everybody in the Far East called him. It goes without saying that, when I was living in Eastern Siberia, I could not help hearing about this legendary person. Besides, I learnt something about him through a young man who had been an officer first with Semionov and then with Ungern. I recall part of what he told me.

'Ungern was the most dashing of *atamans*—a regular

dare-devil. He was a man of great parts, not a petty brigand, a type which flourished at the time. Beyond question, he was highly gifted, and he cherished lofty ambitions. There is every reason to believe that he was eccentric. This was partly explained by the fact that he had suffered the most grievous misfortunes. If I remember rightly, his wife had been raped and tortured to death by the Bolsheviks.

'At one period (1920-21?) he was *de facto* Governor of Mongolia, and it was even said that he meant to march on Peking. He had good friends among the lamas. He was even alleged to have embraced Buddhism. In any case, he showed a marked preference for that religion, probably because of his weakness for mysticism. At the same time, he was a regular Oriental despot. Killing a man came as easily to him as smoking a cigarette.

'In the end, he took to suspecting everybody of Bolshevism, or some sort of intrigue against him, and started getting rid of his acolytes one after the other. Uncertain about what the morrow might bring forth, his lieutenants handed him over to the Reds. The Bolsheviks, after a parody of a trial, lost no time in dispatching him *ad patres*. For long, however, the populace refused to believe that Ungern was dead. People declared that he had been seen, sometimes here, sometimes there.

'I'm very sorry that's all I can tell you . . .'

I had rarely read a more indefinite letter. There was only one date, spread over at least two years. There was only one topographical reference, covering an area of three and a-half million square kilometres. There were no names. There were no facts. Everything was tentative, with a great profusion of 'probablys' and 'perhapses'.

I got a yellow folder, wrote 'Baron U. S.' on it, and put the letter inside.

A little later I went to see a girl friend with whom I was vaguely in love. Marie Anne was unaware of the

fact I should have liked nothing better than keeping quiet in her presence, but I had to go on talking to her all the time. She kept in touch with everything I was doing. Still, I hadn't managed to meet her more than a dozen times in two years. I don't like dealing in generalities. When I had exhausted the last quarter's news, I used to fall back on memories, which is a thankless job for a man of twenty-six.

But this time I had a brand-new subject of conversation.

Marie Anne was wearing grey. It dawned on me that I had never noticed the colour of her eyes before.

'I'm going to write a book,' I told her, first thing.

'A book of essays?' she asked.

As soon as she opened her mouth, dimples dug themselves in her cheeks.

'No. A novel, or at least a semi-novel. About a man who really lived.'

'Who was he?'

'You wouldn't know him.'

'But what was his name?'

'Ungern. Baron Ungern-Sternberg.'

'And what did he do?'

'He fought in a civil war.'

'Where?'

'First in Siberia, then in Mongolia.'

'When?'

'In '19, '20, '21.'

'What was he like?'

'Imagine'—I paused for a moment or two—'imagine a Baltic Baron, belonging to a German family who had been Russified for several generations. Provincial nobility. In the past, the Crusades, the Teutonic Order, war against the Swedes and the Russians, and, in our own time'—I hesitated again—'well, let's say farming poultry and dairy. No difference between the Baron and any wealthy

farmer, except for his title, the arms on his plates and dishes, and the mortgages on his estate'

I tried to gain time

'The Baltic provinces are a flat, sandy district, which produces potatoes and blond men'

'And what about Ungern himself?'

'Well'—I waved my hand vaguely 'imagine a short, blond man, arrogant just because he was shy, married to the daughter of another hard-up baron—a Protestant, like himself. She had three miscarriages for every birth. The two families had already intermarried several times over, and all of them were more or less related and inbred. Still, the couple had one or two children, blond, flaxen-haired, and rickety. They used to hunt crows with stones, and get themselves smacked, with their heads between their father's knees and their backsides in the air, for playing with peasant children. The Baron and the Baroness went to church, entertained their relatives, the pasha, and the police commissioner, and occasionally gave a night's lodging to a Cossack officer in command of a punitive expedition.'

For the last few moments I had simply been marking time. I added

'I forgot to tell you that the Baron wore glasses.'

Marie Anne looked up at me. Her eyes were a very dark brown, almost black.

'And is that all?'

'Oh, no! That's barely the beginning.'

'And what happened then?'

'What happened then was the Russian Revolution. Peasant revolts. Advance of the German troops. Flight of the squires, great and small. The Ungerns took flight like everybody else. The Baroness—'

All at once, I recalled a sentence in that letter. 'His wife was raped and tortured to death by the Bolsheviks.' Hastily, I went on

'They abandoned their farm, their cattle, and their poultry. They went, I think, first to Petrograd, and then to Moscow. The Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic was only two months old, but already it was so precocious that it was cutting its teeth and saying its first words. The bourgeoisie predicted an early death for it. They preferred, however, to watch it from a distance. A swarm of refugees made a rush for the Ukraine and Siberia.

'The Ungerns chose Siberia, thinking it safer because it was farther away, or else for the very good reason that, on the day of their flight, the trains were running only towards the east. They set off, but that wasn't the same thing as getting there. Baroness Ungern became separated from her husband. After travelling for several months, he found himself in the Far East, between Harbin and Vladivostok. He was all by himself. His wife was left behind in Soviet Russia. Between them were the Urals, a whole continent, and presently a fighting front. 'There were no more mails, no more trains.'

'And what about the children?' Marie Anne interrupted me.

I had forgotten their very existence.

'The children stayed with their mother. Ungern remained alone in a little provincial town. Around him embryo dictators stalked the streets. This was in autonomous, democratic Siberia. Captain Michon, of the French Military Mission, undertook an inquiry into the strength of the national forces on which reliance could be placed. Obscure Japanese gave away *yen* and got the low-down on plans. The Allies set about rationalizing the counter-revolution.'

I lit a cigarette.

'Ungern held himself aloof from all this fermentation. Perhaps he had a job in an office. He still wore his glasses. Weeks went by. The civil war began. One day Ungern received news of his wife . . .'

Through the window I could see the Seine, dull and muddy, and a barge laden with anthracite and humidity. I imagined that little blond man, not turning very pale, but with his hand trembling so much that he could not manage to settle his glasses on his nose.

'A man he knew slightly who had just arrived from Moscow came and told him that his wife had been killed. In the indifferent tone of voice of a man who had been travelling for six weeks in a cattle-truck, he added that, to the best of his belief, Baroness Ungern, before she was killed, had been raped and tortured by the Bolsheviks.

'Ungern gave up trying to put on his glasses. He laid them down on the table. Then he stood up, left his visitor where he was, and walked out into the street, bare-headed and without putting on his overcoat. His glasses lay on the edge of the table, two empty orbits united by a gold frame.'

'And what about the children?' asked Marie Ann.

I waved them away, vaguely, sketchily. I had forgotten all about them again.

'Then a new Ungern made his appearance. His farm, his potatoes, his church-going, his glasses --all this went out of currency. The Far East had never heard of the little Baltic squire, but it trembled at the mere name of the "Bloody Baron". He was the most unemotional of killers, the most methodical of butchers. Nobody found mercy in his short-sighted eyes. Ungern was an opponent of sudden death. He fought the revolution by sticking knives into people's ears or beating them with sticks on their genital organs. He invaded Mongolia, and made ready to march on Peking.

'A century or two earlier, he might have succeeded. But, being a bit of the Middle Ages who had strayed into a Siberia in a state of civil war, he was pinched between the Tokio banks and the Red Army. The golden Great Wall was kicked down by the bare-footed soldiers of the

Year III Its collapse shattered windows from Canton to Vladivostok Ungern was found under a fragment of the ruins, quietly crushed to death '

'I hope,' said Marie Anne, 'that you're going to write more simply than you talk '

She paused for reflection When she spoke again, there was a pucker at the root of her nose

'Psychologically,' she went on, 'you may manage all right But what about historically? You're not very definite, are you ? It's not very clear where your story takes place, or when '

'In 1920 In the Far East '

'It's a long way off, the Far East To most of us it doesn't mean much but Japan and China And 1920 is a long way off too What kind of place is this Mongolia of yours?'

I sketched a big circle in the air

'And what was the civil war like?'

I ventured a vague smile

Marie Anne stared at me thoughtfully A furrow was imprinted between her eyebrows

'You'll have to say how Ungern dressed And whether he had a moustache or not '

'I see him clean-shaven,' I put in smoothly

'Perhaps he was But how did he become a general? Where did he fight? And against whom? He wasn't all by himself, either What were the names of his comrades? At what time does it get dark in Mongolia? Was Ungern a good horseman? Did he like eating and drinking? Was he fond of women? Did he smoke? There are trees and birds in Siberia What kind of trees, and what kind of birds? Could Ungern speak Mongol? And what became of his children?'

Marie Anne worked herself up as she talked Her questions straddled one another in disorder They raised a whirlwind of schoolboy memories, sentences out of text-

books, glimpses of photographs the Gobi desert is situated—somewhere or other, the Mongol horseman and his mount, Comrades, the Socialist Fatherland is in danger! The White Guard bands .

I found myself on the stairs again, accompanied by the picture of a little blond man, closely shaven and wearing glasses I had to kill him before I could get out into the street

I STARTED haunting libraries. Everything that had to do with the Far East, Siberia, Mongolia, interested me. history, geography, ethnography, folk-lore. From three-line agency telegrams to the two-thousand-page shorthand report of the Washington Conference, I studied everything. Going back to the past, I deciphered worm-eaten volumes and histories which were not. With a magnifying-glass, you could have followed the trail of my finger-prints on books in the Paris libraries.

At the National Library it was nice and warm and quiet. The walls of that immense necropolis were hidden behind bindings. A haze made luminous by the electric light smoked beneath the cupola. In the central lobby, contemporary authors organized impromptu meetings.

A war-crippled clerk brought me weighty tomes, bound in blue or red linen, which presented parsons and English old maids crossing the Far East in all directions, distributing blows and Bibles impartially and picking up bits of information.

‘After travelling for several days across an arid upland where only a few tents of nomads and caravans presented themselves to our eyes, we finally came to Mr Davidson’s most hospitable house, where he awaited us on the threshold, surrounded by his charming wife and his young sons, who looked as though they had never left the soil of the Old Country.’

Amid all that Yellow sea of suffering, of poverty, these travellers could discern only one or two islets of Whites. Their books were illustrated, but the features of the

Mongols, even more immobile than in life, told me nothing

I also went to the Russian Library. Here I found dozens of books about the civil war in the Far East—books by madmen, books by babblers, books by authorities who exerted themselves to pass off their personal preferences as history.

All the people who had played any kind of part in the White movement—ministers, generals, ambassadors—had written their memoirs. Their hatred of Communism seemed less intense than the hatred which they cherished towards their former comrades in arms. In Tokio, in Munich, in Paris, they published fat volumes in which they chastised irreparable acts with words and condemned their fellow-countrymen *in contumacia*. They persisted in ignoring their opponents' victory, and could see nothing but their own defeat.

About their present position as taxi-drivers or grocers they did not breathe a word. All wrapped up in their titles and ranks, long since outworn, these vainglorious old men, urged by the itch to write, went their way towards death with the aid of imaginary promotions.

Others less fortunately situated, because they had been only junior officers or minor officials, had just as long memories and nurtured quite as much resentment. In default of publishers or other mediums of expression, they were reduced to using the margins of other people's books. These taxi-drivers and workers in automobile factories made their way right across Paris to read the memoirs of their former leaders in the Russian Library. They surrounded the pages with exclamation marks and comments such as 'Traitor!' 'Jew!' 'Coward!' Everything that might be read between the lines of these books was shown up here, pencilled in, rubbed out, and scrawled in again by subordinates bursting with retrospective rage. The civil war was still in progress in the margins of memoirs.

But it was long since over at the Museum of Contemporary History at Vincennes In the courtyard of the château, Senegalese riflemen went through their drill, in tight uniforms which might have been bequeathed to them by their forerunners, the Gauls Sparrows pecked at dung Caps more or less gold-braided flashed through the air, surmounting officers tall or short

Nevertheless, at Vincennes I unearthed treasures in the shape of old newspapers, yellow and tattered at their folds The *Irkutsk Russian Cause*, the *Shanghai Russian Echo*, the *Pekin Russian Review*, the *Harbin Voice of Russia*, the *Tomsk Voice of Russia*, the *New York Voice of Russia*, lavished testimonies from the grave upon me Notes accumulated on my desk

Among them were definite but unimportant details, quotations from speeches, scraps of statistics I learnt that the winter of 1920 was mild in Transbaikalia, and that when Admiral Kolchak was in a bad temper he used to snap pencils in two and upset ink-pots

Now and again I lighted on the name of Ungern Here was a telegram about the movements of his troops Here was a reference to his conduct on the Austrian front Here, again, was a list of his victims

I sorted out all this information in chronological order, in the hope that later on, when I could put every isolated item in its proper place, a graph would automatically emerge out of them I had no idea as yet what its curve would be In my simplicity, I hoped it would be a straight line

Meanwhile I applied myself to reconstructing the background .

1 One day, in 1918, dawn rose over Harbin, that collective cess-pool of the Far East.

Its houses, which hitherto had stood out against the barely tinted sky merely as a vague mass, became alive

with windows, doors, shop-signs. Workers hastened their steps as they heard the tramp of patrols. A Russian butcher came out into the street, looked up at the sky, stretched himself, yawned, went back to his shop, and covered its slabs with joints of meat and calves' heads. In the courtyard a Chinese pedlar strung necklaces of imitation pearls and made paper flowers. A fruiterer opened the door of his shop. Opposite him, a haberdasher switched on his lights. Schoolboys trotted along, with their satchels slung over their shoulders. There was a scream from the brakes of an automobile, full of human merchandize—a freight of painted faces betrayed by the daylight. Doors slammed. Housewives set off for their marketing. A dog mounted guard outside the butcher's.

General Rezukhin, fat in the neck and purple in the face, plunged into the vestibule of General Headquarters. He banged his fist on a table and bawled at the top of his voice. If Lieutenant Zabiakin, arrested by order of Kolchak, was not released at once, he, Rezukhin, would have two of the admiral's officers arrested. A bald, moustached colonel set off to tell Kolchak so. A little later he came back.

'General,' he said, 'His Excellency instructs me to inform you that, if you imprison two of his officers, he will have three of your men arrested.'

Rezukhin's neck turned crimson.

'All right,' he retorted, 'I'll go on arresting one more man than you do.'

He jostled his orderly out of the way and went out.

A crowd overflowed the roadway. The click of spurs accompanied the creak of swords. Mud sprang up like flowers beneath the wheels of automobiles. Multi-coloured flags bedecked radiator-caps. Inside the cars were nurses whose lips were redder than the red cross embroidered on their kerchiefs, envoys from the Ataman Annenkov, wearing scarlet forage-caps displaying a death's head and

two crossed shin-bones, some of the Ataman Kalmukov's officers with yellow tabs bearing a big black 'K' sewn on their sleeves, other officers belonging to Orlov's irregulars, tricked out with epaulets with trimming twisted into the shape of a noose

Already the night restaurants were reopening their doors. Outside the 'Palermo' the Chinese pedlar offered his strings of imitation pearls and his paper flowers to passers-by.

At General Headquarters a sentry drowsed with his head lying on a big map which covered the table. Upon it black arrows shooting from Harbin, Vladivostok and Chita converged upon Moscow. The soldier's head reposed upon the Urals and the Upper Volga.

At the club cards fell by twos and threes as players tried to make up a nine. A khaki arm, adorned with a yellow tab and the letter 'K', held the bank. The few civilians present looked as if they were naked. Outside, shots suddenly rang out. Promptly paralytic players jammed under the table, convulsively kicking laggards out of the way. A moustached attorney crawled on all fours, burrowing into the floor with his nose as though he were trying to hide himself in between two boards. He bumped against bodies flatter than the kings and queens that lay abandoned on the green cloth.

The butcher, the greengrocer, and the haberdasher had shut up their shops. An automobile, with all its lights blazing, drove on to the sidewalk. Three stripling subalterns, standing up in the car, shouted madly.

'God save the Czar!' Off with your hats, you swine!

The Chinese pedlar was slow in raising his hand to his hat. Three shots cracked in the air like whip-lashes. The street emptied. The headlights nailed to the ground a body riddled with black holes and a bouquet of paper flowers.

2 Sitting at his desk in his study, Captain Michon wrote

‘ forces with which to reckon. On the one side, the parties of the Left, who, though they claim socialist ideas, are uncompromising enemies of the Bolsheviks. They have given the measure of their incapacity in the person of Kerensky, and they do not seem to present much interest for France, all the more so because, according to my information, the workers are hostile to them, and a policy of supporting them would run the risk of losing us the sympathy of right-thinking elements.’

He plunged his pen in the ink-pot, fished out a fly soaked with ink, laid it on the blotting-paper, and went on.

‘Here, in Harbin, General Horvat, director of the East China Railway, enjoys considerable prestige, both because of his long residence in the country and the confidence which His Majesty the Emperor Nicholas II always placed in him. Some people see in him the possible leader of a national liberating movement. From the information I have been able to gather, however, it emerges that General Horvat, while highly esteemed by the civil population, is less influential in Russian military circles.’

Captain Michon glanced up at the photographs on the walls of his room. Joffre looked back at him kindly. Foch remained distant. Over the desk, Clemenceau stared at the President of the Republic contemptuously. The captain felt less lonely.

‘In my opinion,’ he wrote, ‘an understanding might more easily be reached through the person of Admiral Kolchak, formerly Commander-in-Chief of the Russian naval forces in the Black Sea, who recently arrived from the United States and is at present in Harbin. He is respected for the uprightness of his character and the sobriety of his views. Admiral Kolchak endeared himself to those of his fellow-countrymen who were not blinded by extremist doctrines by his heroic conduct at the time of

the revolution. Called upon to hand over the insignia of his rank to the rebellious rabble, he preferred to throw his sword overboard rather than surrender it into unworthy hands. Though he appears to be linked up with British and American circles, the admiral is entirely favourable to France, and, when sounded by a member of our mission, showed himself most eager to collaborate closely with us.

‘Finally, the Ataman Semionov, the Cossack officer whom I have already mentioned to you, seems to enjoy every sympathy among the Russian and Mongol population of Transbaikalia, where he is at present carrying on a struggle against Lenin’s supporters. The only outstanding personality in the country, where there are only too many windbags, the ataman has managed to attract to his side a picked body of officers. He may well prove to be the strong leader, giving expression to the best aspirations of the Russian people, who alone would be capable of saving his unhappy country.’

Captain Michon read his report over. Then he stood up, went to the door, and listened. He walked over to the mantelpiece, took down a book, and out of its binding extracted a secret cipher.

Major Lockray was tall and thin, suffered from malaria, and had a fiancée to whom he wrote once a week.

‘What horrors’, he had recently written to her, ‘are people able to bear without murmuring, once they get used to them, as usually happens at a time of revolution!’

His long letters to his fiancée were accompanied by dried specimens of Transbaikalian flora.

At the moment, however, the major was not thinking about his fiancée.

‘Beginning February 1918,’ he wrote, ‘Semionov occupied Dauria on Transbaikalian railway. Was dislodged beginning March by Bolshevik troops and fell back on Manchuli. April 14th revolt of Czechs at Cheliabinsk,

Western Siberia Mid-April Semionov resumed offensive and occupied Borzia, Oloviannaya, and Aksha, following railway line Driven back, arrived Harbin end May At present preparing fresh offensive Czechs occupied April 26th Novo-Nikolaievsk, 30th Tomsk, June 8th Samara, 15th Omsk, control Trans-Siberian railway neighbourhood Vladivostok

'Reference your telegram 5th inst, Semionov, already supported by Japanese, requested Anglo-French financial aid In agreement with French representative paid him monthly £5000 each As Semionov guilty acts brigandage against persons wealthy travellers, suspended payment, inviting Japanese beginning April cease supporting Semionov In face refusal Japanese command, have had resume monthly payments, in order avoid exclusive Japanese control over Semionov Could persuade ataman stop pillaging warehouses and peaceful population and transfer his repression to person Communists, but baffled by indifference French and Japanese representatives this respect Suggest continue assist Semionov pending appointment Kolchak as chief Russian forces'

Major Lockray finished his telegram He stretched himself, and, taking a sheet of blue notepaper, wrote in his precise handwriting 'My dear ' On his right a little spray of savin was nearly dried between the pages of his secret cipher .

Lieutenant Sudzuki, for his part, took small interest in botany, being absorbed by his service of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan Slowly the lieutenant finished drafting his report

' saw the ataman again in accordance with Your Excellency's instructions Semionov entirely shares our point of view, and will act in strict conformity with our suggestions If we do not succeed in putting him at the head of the Russian troops, we can in any case assure him,

with the support of our troops, of control of Transbaikalia and the border districts of Mongolia and Manchuria

'In reply to Your Excellency's question, I hasten to state that the ataman's chief assistants are Taskin, formerly member of the Duma, Colonel Sipailov, and Lieutenant-General Ungern. The last-named served in the same regiment as Semionov on the Austrian front'

The post-office was empty. The clerk drowsed snugly, with his head resting on a tale of travel in the South Sea islands. The door opened. Lieutenant Sudzuki looked round the room, handed a long telegram to the clerk, and went out again.

He had scarcely gone when Captain Michon flung the door open. He hurried to the counter and glanced over his telegram for the last time. While the clerk was counting the number of words, the Frenchman looked idly at the scales, on which lay a telegram addressed to Tokio. Then he paid the amount due and left.

A quarter of an hour later Major Lockray arrived. He got the clerk to hand over his colleagues' telegrams and carefully copied them into his notebook. Then he handed the clerk a cable for London and a registered letter. The bottom of the envelope was rather bulky. The major had slipped in the spray of savin. He handed the clerk a bank-note, and went off without waiting for any change.

Before transmitting the three telegrams, the clerk carefully copied the British officer's report, all in figures like a ready-reckoner, and that of the French captain. Its barbaric consonances reminded him of some South Sea tribe's dialect. Having finished his work, he slipped the sheets into his pocket and set off for Lieutenant Sudzuki's quarters.

An hour later the major, the captain, and the lieutenant, all elegantly attired and closely shaved, met at the club, where they dined together, as they did every evening.

3 'Good gracious, Issak, what are you doing in Harbin? When did you get here?'

'I've just arrived.'

'Where have you come from?'

'From Moscow.'

'What, really?'

'Yes, really, my dear fellow I've only taken two months to get here. Our friends the Bolsheviks can't even run trains. What's happening here? Have you been here long?'

'Since December. Things are going very well here. I belong to Orlov's detachment. There are two hundred of us already. We're well paid. Peter is with me.'

'And what about Laurenz?'

'He's at Dauria, with Ungern.'

'Do you think I could join up somewhere?'

'Why, of course you could! You've all the choice you want. Kolchak, Orlov, Semionov, Ungern. . . Everybody's busy here. For my part, I work from morning till night. I'm drawing up the plan of attack. You'll remember I was always good at geography. We're going to invade Transbaikalia, drive the enemy back to the west, and open an offensive to the north. . . So you see I've plenty to do, Issak, old fellow.'

'And what about girls?'

'There's certainly no lack of them. D'you know, I never drank such good champagne in Moscow as I've drunk in Harbin. . . By the way, how are things in Moscow?'

'Terrible. You daren't show your face in the street any more.'

'What about the baroness?'

'She was buried the day before I left.'

'And Coco?'

'Gone to join General Kornilov in the South.'

'And Prince Troubetskoy?'

'Got across the Finnish frontier.'

'And His Excellency?'
'Shot by the Cheka'
'And the Narishkins?'
'They're arriving here next week'
'Well, isn't there anybody left in Moscow, Issak?'
'Not a soul The place is dead, stone dead'

4 The 'Palermo' restaurant was crowded all night long Through the smoke, in between the tables almost on top of one another, the waiters pushed their way, with their trays tilted almost sideways Officers imprinted their gilded epaulets upon plump bare arms The orchestra rattled out *On a Manchurian Volcano*

In the vestibule, where the smoke was less dense, pegs were hidden under an avalanche of clothes On the floor heavy galoshes stood in pairs, with slits at the back where spurs went through Higher up, generals' grey cloaks embraced one another, displaying their red linings the only material of this colour to be seen anywhere, for red was the one colour that had not been used for flags On top were piled caps, with their cockades peeping out like the glassy eyes of stuffed birds

A singer made her appearance, with a crucifix hanging between her skinny breasts She offered herself desperately with her voice, with her eyes, with her hips General Rezukhin drew his sword, cut two branches off the artificial palm-tree which flourished beside him in an earthenware pot, tore off the red ribbon of the Order of Saint Vladimir which he wore across his chest, wrapped it round the palm-leaves, and sent the bouquet to the singer. The audience applauded

In a corner Major Lockray, Captain Michon, and Lieutenant Sudzuki surveyed the company with unadmiring eyes

Issak hailed a waiter

'I say, do you know that Japanese officer?'

‘Yes’

‘He’s forming a detachment of volunteers, isn’t he?’

‘So they say’

‘Could you tell him that I want to speak to him?’

‘You’re the sixth person who’s asked me that to-night’

‘It will mean a good tip for you’

The waiter went over to the Japanese and whispered a few words to him. Sudzuki turned round and stared at the Russian officer. He noted his prominent ears, his incipient baldness, his little red nose. Issak sketched an ingratiating smile. He offered himself desperately with his eyes, with his hips, with his voice.

General Rezukhin inspected the bill which had just been presented to him. He had no intention of paying it. What was the name of that Chinese general he had met the other day? Oh yes, General Ma. It would be a good joke to play on him.

‘A pencil!’

A dozen pencils flew to meet his outstretched hand. In unsteady handwriting he scrawled on his bill: ‘Handed to General Ma for examination and report’.

Outside it was snowing lazily. A coolie stopped outside the ‘Palermo’, listened for a moment or two to the noise which escaped from the restaurant, and went on again. A few yards farther on he bent down, picked up a bit of bread lying on the ground, and thrust it into his pocket. The streets were badly lit. The sound of footsteps rang out. A patrol appeared: four soldiers with fixed bayonets, escorting two men, one wearing a cap, the other bare-headed. Their faces showed stains of grease and oil. The coolie flattened himself against the wall, and followed the party with his eyes. One of the workmen—the bare-headed one—walked with a limp in his left leg.

5 In Zozounov’s tea-shop there were no women

Around little tables, in front of the cash-desk, and standing in corners, men wearing coats with fur collars and bowler hats pushed on the back of their heads were talking with animation, but in friendly fashion

‘I’ll sell for five hundred *yen* ’

‘I’ll buy for a thousand dollars ’

‘A wagon-load of sugar ’

‘A safe-conduct from Semionov ’

In the middle of the room an orator perorated

‘Gentlemen a downright shame! Brought
this very day to Harbin Red wounded! We
ought to demand—demand, I say!—that orders be given
for these swine to be shot on the spot ’

‘Two teas, Marie ’

‘Fortunately Ataman Semionov The Cossacks of
Transbaikalia are going over to his side by the thousand—
by the thousand, I say! There’s a man who enjoys prestige
among the Mongols Born here Speaks the
language of those people So you see ’

‘Marie, one cocoa, very hot ’

‘What we want is masterful men ’

‘I’m told at Headquarters that our detachments are
being reinforced by two thousand Japanese volunteers
One hundred and fifty *yen* a month, two thousand for a
wound, and ten thousand in case of death ’

‘This way, Colonel, this way! What can I get for you,
Colonel?’

‘Who’s that?’

‘Colonel Laurenz, one of Ungern’s officers ’

‘Long live our country’s defenders! Gentlemen, I give
you a toast the Army! ’

‘Thank you very much, gentlemen, thank you very
much!’

‘As I was saying, there’s no risk I put two wagons at
your disposal, starting from Vladivostok, together with
Semionov’s guarantee What more can you want?’

'That's all very well, but then there's Daunia, there's Ungern Do you think he'll let the goods through?'

'Of course, when he's under Semionov's orders, and the ataman gives you a safe-conduct'

'Under Semionov's orders' So they say But, with the Baron, you never know If he doesn't like the look of my moustache, or takes it into his head that I'm a Jew'

'Hush! the colonel is listening to us'

'What colonel?'

'Colonel Laurenz, in command at Daunia'

'Fine day, hasn't it been, Colonel? I must drink to the success of your arms Marie, Marie!'

'Gentlemen, I am only an unpretending officer, but I swear to you Know how to do my duty to the end United under the same flag, in defence of our Mother Russia, we shall we shall I say we shall'

'God'

'Get up!'

' in a triumphal march'

' save'

'Then it's understood about the wagons?'

'Your health, Colonel!'

'A thousand dollars'

' the Czar'

'Gentlemen, in a month we shall all be meeting in Moscow!'

6 'My dear comrades,

'I have little hope that this letter will ever reach you The soldier who has promised to smuggle it out for me may be transferred at any moment You can trust him. he is one of us

'We have had to fight against everybody I'm not talking about those swine of officers They were too busy boozing and sleeping with tarts to be dangerous When they got drunk they started firing, but they couldn't shoot

straight We also had against us the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries Some of the workers once believed in them, but that didn't last There's no propaganda like the propaganda of hard facts Then there are Semionov and Kalmikov and Ungern If any of them catch sight of three pals in working clothes talking together, they have them shot

'Remember that, but don't forget that behind these men there are the British, and the French, and the Czechs, and, above all, the Japanese Remember that, before their departure for the mainland, the Japanese soldiers receive a little Russian vocabulary in which the word "*Borsouk*", meaning "Bolshevik", is followed by the note "To be exterminated" But remember also that a Japanese soldier gets only a packet of cigarettes and a *yen* or two a month, whereas his officers get 400 *yen*, and that one of our weak points has been our ignorance of Japanese

'And now, my dear comrades, I must tell you about our pals Gorlenko and I were arrested at the workshop during the evening of June 19th They wouldn't let us change our clothes or even clean ourselves The streets were deserted Gorlenko found it hard to walk because of his leg They brought us to the prison from which I am writing to you Here we found some of our comrades

"There was no proof against us Nevertheless, on the third day, soldiers under the command of an officer named Burdukovski came and took Ivanov, Afanassiev, and Gorlenko away We learnt later that they had been burned alive in the boiler of a locomotive, and that the same fate awaited us Remember those names Gorlenko, Afanassiev, and Ivanov—Chura Ivanov

'Since I have been in prison, I hear that the third Regional Congress of Workers was held during August, and that it was decided to wage a guerrilla war I wish you the best of luck, comrades Don't count on anybody but yourselves Moscow is far away, and they have enough

troubles of their own there Get yourselves arms, or manufacture them for yourselves Surely it isn't for nothing that we have learned to use our hands

'Don't forget those three names Ivanov, Afanassiev, Gorlenko Good-bye '

MY COMPANION took a sip of coffee

‘Yes, indeed,’ he said, ‘it was a queer time’

I looked him over with much curiosity

During the past three months, while I had been working in the libraries, finding pleasure in a cross-fire of testimonies which I had every reason to suppose were posthumous, I had got into the habit of considering the years I was studying as belonging to a period dead and gone, like the Renaissance or the French Revolution of '89. Though I said to myself that barely ten years had since elapsed, I could not manage to swim against the stream of recriminations and verbs in the past definite

Now that, for the first time, I was sitting face to face with a man who had taken part in those events in Siberia, I felt as though I were living through that silly story of the mummy which came to life under the Egyptologist's hands

I had met him by chance in Montparnasse. Baltic by origin, during his student days in Russia he had been surprised by the war and the revolution. He had lived in America, paid a visit to the Far East, and gone in for journalism before finding his true place in life at a table in a Paris café, where you can grow old in peace at the cost of a white coffee a day

Out of his stay in the United States he had preserved a taste for square-toed brown shoes; and out of his travels in Transbaikalia he had preserved the memory of a meeting with Ungern

I had lured him into this café on the boulevards by

promising him a roast-beef sandwich and a coffee. He was now going out of his way to make himself agreeable to me.

'I arrived at Dauria in the afternoon,' he said, 'and asked to see the Baron. I was directed to an inn where he had established his headquarters. An orderly officer with a pointed skull glanced indifferently at my Press card, ran over its English text, which he couldn't understand, and examined the stamp and my photograph.

' "I doubt whether His Excellency can receive you," he said. "What exactly do you want?"

' "I want to interview the General about his plans. I have been received by the Supreme Regent Kolchak and by the Ataman Semionov. My dispatches are circulated by the Associated Press."

' "By what?"

' "By the Associated Press."

' "Never heard of it."

' "It is."

' "All right, it doesn't matter. In any case, His Excellency is busy at the moment."

' "I have been received by the Ataman Semionov."

' "I don't care whether you have or not. The ataman has no authority in Dauria."

' A voice rang out through the wall.

' "Zabiakin!"

' The officer hastened out of the room. In a few moments he came back.

' "His Excellency cannot receive you," he said. "If you'll take my advice, you'll go, and be quick about it. You'd better. Otherwise there's no knowing what might happen."

' "I am an American citizen," I replied. "I interviewed Diego Martinez on the eve of his *coup d'état*. I met Joffre during the Battle of the Marne. I'm not going."

The ex-journalist preened himself as he recalled these

happenings of ten years or more ago. He had certainly never worked for the Associated Press, he had never been near Joffe, and there was no such person as Diego Martinez. But, under Zabiakin's hostile eyes, he showed off (just as he was doing to-day, because there were women passing up and down the sidewalk). He put on airs (just as he had done now, when a waiter approached our table). Still, he must have been cold in his trench-coat, and he must have gone hungry for a long time. He stretched out his hand for a crescent of bread, glanced at me for my consent to his taking it, and went on.

'After a short silence, Zabiakin asked

' "So you're an American, eh?"

' "Yes."

' "Then how does it happen that you speak Russian?"

'He stared at me suspiciously. I felt ill at ease.

' "Well, you see," I said, "I'm of Baltic origin."

' "What?"

' "I was born at Reval, in Esthonia."

' "Why didn't you say so before?" Lieutenant Zabiakin smiled. "In that case, you're a fellow-countryman of His Excellency's, eh?"

' "Quite so."

' "Just wait here a moment."

'Zabiakin walked over to the door at the other side of the room and knocked twice. In a moment or two he was back again.

' "His Excellency says will you be good enough to step inside?" he said.

'Unger's room was furnished with a camp-bed, a table, and two chairs. He was standing at the table, studying a pack of cards spread out in front of him. He raised his head.

' "Spades," he said, "always spades. And the ace of hearts. You'd think there were fifty-one spades in the

pack You don't know," he asked me suddenly, "what the ace of hearts means?"

"No, Your Excellency"

"Then you ought to" The Baron brooded for a moment or two "The Mongols," he went on, "believe that the heart is a triangle situated in the middle of the chest, and that its apex points to the right in men and to the left in women Of course, you think that's nonsense, don't you?"

"He stared at me in no friendly fashion I murmured

"I'm bound to say, Your Excellency"

"I didn't feel very comfortable

"You may be right," said Ungern "Or you may be wrong" He brooded again for a moment or two Then he went on, sharply

"How do you explain the fact that the Mongols manage to cure diseases which we European regard as incurable?"

"I preferred to make no reply

"I'd give a good deal to know what the ace of hearts means," said the Baron, as though he were talking to himself "Do you think it's a good sign or a bad sign?"

"With difficulty, I raked up a few memories of poker I was on the point of saying something when the Baron cut me short

"You're from the Baltic region, eh?"

"Yes, Your Excellency"

"Born at Reval?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"In what street?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, in what street were you born?"

"In Horse's-head Street"

"What's the highest point in the town?"

"The Olai Church"

"What are the leading Baltic families called?"

‘ “The Four of the Fist ”

‘ “And who are they?”

‘ “The Ungerns, the Uakulls, the Tiesenhausens, and the Rosens ”

‘ “And why do we bear the name of Ungern?”

‘ “Really, Your Excellency ”

‘ “When Noah’s ark was afloat on the waters of the deluge, our ancestor swam alongside and asked if he could come on board ‘*Ungern*’, replied Noah, which is German for ‘Unwillingly’ Our ancestor went on board just the same ”

The Baron laughed suddenly, stopped abruptly, and added

‘ “We’ve always been good swimmers in our family ”

‘ Again there was a silence To keep myself in countenance, I pulled out my note-book

‘ “I had the pleasure of seeing you at Reval,” I said “But I did not recognize Your Excellency ”

‘ “Well, ask me your questions,” the Baron bade me “But I warn you, I hate the Americans They’re all Jews and revolutionaries ”

‘ I made no comment “Brusque but friendly reception”, I jotted down in my notebook “Story of Noah’s ark ” What questions could I reasonably ask him? I made up my mind

‘ “How long have you been in the Far East, Your Excellency?”

‘ “Since the beginning of ’18 That makes a year and a-half ”

‘ “Where did you start from?”

‘ “From Reval ”

‘ “Why . . . well, why didn’t you stay there?”

‘ “Stay there? What for? To protect the Esthonian peasants against the Russian peasants? No, thanks! Look here”—the Baron’s voice became less harsh—“war has become impossible in Europe There are no such things as

armies any more. There are no such things as leaders any more. It's all social legislation and trades unions and parliaments. You can't even sack a servant nowadays. Discipline, principles—the Jews and the workers have destroyed all that. All of it, all of it!"

"He got up and started walking up and down the room.

"We must begin all over again," he went on. "Make a clean sweep. Exterminate all those vermin. Here in the East people have a sense of monarchy, a sense of divine right, a sense of war. Chinese, Manchurians, Mongols, Japanese—there you have men who know how to fight, how to obey. Men who know how to die. At their head we must reconquer Europe. Those dirty workers who've never had any servants of their own, but still think they can command, those Jews who started the revolution to be revenged on us, those women who lie in wait for you everywhere—in the streets, in drawing-rooms, with their legs spread out—we've got to get rid of all that. We've got to get rid of cities, machinery, newspapers. Civilization—don't talk to me about civilization! It has led us to revolution, to anarchy. Men have gone mad—mad, I tell you! They have turned stupid and slack. They have forgotten all about the lash and the rope. But not for long. Already the dawn is rising in the East. Just as seven hundred years ago the Great Leader."

"The Great Leader?" I repeated, in an undertone. "Do you mean Kolchak?"

"Don't talk to me about Kolchak—that bastard of the revolution! He's as bad as the Bolsheviks, with his Constituent Assembly. I'm talking about the greatest of warriors."

"The Baron laid both hands on the table and leant across it.

"the greatest of leaders."

"I waited, with my ears pricked up and my fountain-pen poised.

‘ “I’m talking about Genghis Khan ”

‘ Ungern swept his hand over the table A flight of cards settled at his feet The Baron said no more

‘ I ventured a remark

‘ “You seem to me to be rather hard on Admiral Kolchak After all, President Wilson said ”

‘ “President Wilson !” the Baron interrupted me “It’s always some president or other Presidents of parliaments, presidents of trades unions All Jewish revolutionaries Lost, damned, done for ”

‘ The Baron walked over to the window The Mongol soldiers outside stiffened to attention Under their fur caps, like chrysanthemums in flower, their clean-shaven, slightly yellow faces were impassive

‘ Ungern came back to the table

‘ “They have no towns, no fortresses,” he said, slowly “They carry their homes with them wherever they go Besides, there isn’t one of them who isn’t used to shooting from horseback They don’t live by farming, but by grazing Their covered wagons are their only houses How can they fail to be invincible?”

‘ I thought he was quoting something

‘ “What’s that?” I asked.

‘ “You’ll find it all in Herodotus,” replied Ungern, in a voice that had suddenly grown tired

‘ Talking to himself again, he went on

‘ “They know how to obey They never complain. How, how can they fail to be invincible?”

‘ My fountain-pen was as busy as a seismograph I jotted down the gist Genghis Khan Convinced supporter of monarchy Democracy and discipline Women and warriors Jews I underlined that twice. Knows Herodotus, but doesn’t seem to know much about Wilson What a splash this would make in the papers !

‘ I found Ungern studying me as though he had only just become aware of my presence His eyes strayed from

my pen to my face His features registered weariness and, not to put too fine a point on it, disgust

“That’s all,” he said “You can go”

“I was slow in getting up

“Get out, will you?” snarled Ungern, and he bent down to pick up his cards’

That day, sitting in the heart of Paris, at the time when the tidal wave of the evening newspapers, rising from the depths of the rue Montmartre, breaks upon the boulevards, for the first time I realized that Ungern had really lived

Blood started circulating on the shop-fronts blue blood in the mercury veins, red blood in the Neon arteries Rose and yellow balls spring to life in the violet dusk ‘*L’Intran*’, shouted the newsboys, ‘*Paris-Son*, *Paris-Sports*, *Liberte*’

Opposite me, a seedy fellow hastily dipped another piece of bread in his cup, glancing at me fearfully, obsequiously ‘Full racing results’, yelled the newsboys He gathered the crumbs together in the palm of his hand, swallowed them, and passed a pointed tongue over his grey lips A greedy gleam shone in his eyes

He was too hungry to lie He was ransacking his memories, all bent on doing it ‘Final sporting edition’, shouted the newsboys, and, as my companion went on talking, across the sheets damp with fresh ink which were being unfolded on the café terrace, I saw Ungern emerging from the memoirs, the cables, the official communications—all that dust of words with which for weeks past I had glutted myself

He had neither form nor face yet His voice scarcely reached me, drowned as it was by automobile horns and electric bells But already I could feel his presence terribly.

SO UNGERN was a native of Reval I knew that debilitating town, having once stayed there five weeks I might have written to Reval directly To be sure, I had no friends there, but I had associates, acquaintances, neighbours They were, however, men who, though they would not refuse me a piece of information, would do their best— in all sincerity, of course, and solely in my own interests—to stop me ever writing anything at all I preferred to address myself to a lady friend of Baltic origin

I wrote to her in Berlin She replied to me from London, telling me she was just starting for Italy That was just like her She was a professional traveller, though she was incapable of packing her own baggage She was trailed across Europe by letters from men whom talent, wealth, or birth had made famous They pursued her with platonic affection, which she tolerated artistically and experimentally I had known her to be indiscreet only once or twice in her life, and shy only in the presence of one man She ate heartily, and drank still more heartily The flood of autographs which overwhelmed her had inspired her neither with megalomania nor with persecution-mania

I was not mistaken She had known Ungern She had met him at a reception She had even danced with him At that time he was an officer He danced badly He had relatives in Esthonia and in the Far East I had only to go and call on Baron T, who was actually living in Paris He and his wife had known the Ungerns well They would be delighted to give me any information they could

I heralded my visit by letter, and presented myself at

Baron T's the next day. A servant in a starched apron preceded me along a passage, asked whom she should announce, opened a door, and shot my name through it. I found myself in a drawing-room.

Two old people were sitting on one of those baroque pieces of furniture, in the shape of an 'S', which are called *vis-à-vis* in France and lovers' seats in England. The two of them had chubby faces with folds that looked swept and lines that looked dusted, hair translucently white, and, in their hardening veins, a thin stream of lack-lustre blood which no longer reached their finger-tips.

The Baron came round the sofa to meet me.

'Delighted to make your acquaintance,' he said. 'Permit me to introduce you to my wife.'

'How do you do?' said the Baroness. She added at once 'So you're interested in Roman?'

'I beg your pardon?' said I.

'We saw him born,' explained the old man, 'and we always call him Roman. My wife means Roman Nicholas Max, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg.'

He laid his hand on his wife's shoulder.

'I mustn't give you the impression that we were actually present at his birth,' he went on. 'In fact, Roman came into the world in Austria, at Graz. But we were friends with his grandparents and his mother, and we knew him in his cradle.'

'A fine child,' said the Baroness.

'A fine family,' added her husband. 'Come and see for yourself.'

He led me to a corner of the drawing-room, and pointed to the wall in silence.

A coat of arms in a black wooden frame hung from the picture-rail. Seven stars and three gilded lilies alternated on an azure field.

'That's the old escutcheon of the Ungerns, which the family retained until 1531,' said the Baron. 'We have

abundant proof of that Wilhelm von Ungern's seal, dating from 1466, that of Heinrich von Ungern, which goes back to 1500, and so on'

He cast a knowing glance at me

'I know what you're going to say The resemblance between this escutcheon and that of the von Lievens must have leapt to your eyes In the case of the von Lievens, the field, instead of being azure, is gules Otherwise the similarity is complete Tradition has it that the two families were related from time immemorial, which would explain a good many things'

He paused for my reply, but I said nothing So he went on

'You are naturally surprised that I should have kept this escutcheon, when it has ceased to be that of the Ungerns for the past four hundred years But you can guess the reason You will recall the escutcheon of Georg von Ungern, quartered, with its one and four azure'

I resigned myself to looking round the drawing-room It was all draped with linen d'oyleys, occupied by porcelain figures

The Baron was still talking

'Alas! those arms were altered in 1653, and not at all to their advantage The seven stars—though they are a very typical "furnishing"—disappeared, and the rose, from being gules, became argent Finally, upon the whole was superimposed the so-called escutcheon of the Sternbergs azure, a star or supported by a mountain with three cuttings sinople Thus did a Swedish blazoner of the bad period—a man who must have been lacking in any critical sense—make a mess in the most inconsiderate way of the ancient escutcheon of the von Ungerns'

The Baron stopped talking and stared at me.

'With your permission,' he said, 'I should like to give you a piece of advice'

'Please do,' said I

'Never write "Ungern von Steinberg", but always "von Ungern-Sternberg", as is specified in the Swedish patent of 1653. In French, write "Baron Ungern", or, more fully, in accordance with a tradition which goes back to 1683, "d'Ungern-Sternberg".'

I took advantage of a fresh pause on his part to ask

'You said Ungern was born in Austria, didn't you?'

'In 1885. December 29th, 1885, old style. Roman was the younger son. His brother, Constantine, was a little older.'

'And their father was?'

'Their mother, Sophia Charlotta, was a von Wimpffen. She came of a well-known family of Wurtemberg officers. Their great-grandmother on the Wimpffen side was a Moltke.'

'And their father was?'

'Sophia Charlotta's mother was a Demoiselle Amélie Roux de Damiani, whose father had been a representative plenipotentiary of Eugène de Beauharnais. Roman's grandfather was lord of Kertel, in the island of Dago. You are aware that the family is reckoned one of the oldest in Estland.'

'So the father?'

But the old man, lost in his fields of oil and azure, was not listening to me. Finally, in a somewhat hesitant voice, his wife said.

'Roman's father was a bad man.'

'Elise, Elise!'

The Baron turned round and gazed at the old lady reproachfully.

'I say what I think,' said she.

'I know you never liked Theodore.'

'He made Sophia Charlotta unhappy,' cut in the Baroness.

Her husband turned towards me.

'My wife was a great friend of Roman's mother,' he

explained 'Sophia Charlotta married Baron Theodore von Ungern-Sternberg in 1880. He was a very learned man. He had studied geology and chemistry in Germany and in France, and he was a doctor of philosophy and a corresponding member of the Imperial Society of Geography. In addition, he was a lieutenant in the Uhlans of the Guard, and attaché to the Governor of the Caucasus.'

'Ferdinand,' interrupted the Baroness, persistently, 'he was a bad man.'

'The marriage was dissolved in 1891,' my host hastened to say, 'and the father had to bind himself never to see his sons again.'

'Sophia Charlotta,' the Baroness supplemented, 'was afraid that her ex-husband would have a bad influence over them. Especially Roman, who was six years old at the time. He was very impressionable, and he was fond of his father.'

'What exactly had Baroness Ungern got against her husband?' I asked.

'In 1895,' said the old man, without answering me, 'she married Baron Oscar Hoyningen-Huene, who was of good family too, though not such an old one as the Ungerns. With her two sons, she went to live on her husband's estate, which was called Jerwakant. A tutor looked after the boys' education.'

'So they didn't go to school?'

'Yes, Roman went to the Nicholas High School at Reval in 1900, when he was fourteen. Study didn't appeal to him very much. I think he was already dreaming about soldiering. Soldiers had always been as numerous in the Ungern family as oaks in heraldry.'

'He was lazy,' put in the Baroness.

'Don't say that, Elise,' protested her husband. 'There are certain utilitarian ideas with which a man of good birth has nothing to do.'

'That doesn't alter the fact that he was expelled from school. Sophia Charlotta was heartbroken. She didn't know what to do. Finally it was decided that Roman should be sent to Saint Petersburg to train for entrance into the Corps of Cadets.'

'He entered the Corps of Cadets in 1903,' my host took up the tale. 'But that was only just another stop-gap for him. He was a born soldier, a true Ungern. So—'

'Ferdinand,' said his wife, 'you're forgetting about the cards episode.'

The Baron seemed embarrassed.

'So I am, Elise,' he said. 'But it doesn't matter so much as all that, and I wonder—'

'Ferdinand!' repeated the Baroness.

'Well,' went on the Baron, 'in the Corps, Roman started gambling. He gambled, and he lost. In short, one day he had to go back to Jerwakant and confess the whole story to his stepfather. Of course, Baron Huene paid the boy's debts, and after that Roman never touched a card again.'

The Baron paused.

'From the very beginning of the Russo-Japanese War,' he continued, 'Roman begged to be sent to the front, but Cadets were strictly forbidden to go. Roman, however, persisted to such a point that he was discharged from the Cadets, and he went off to Manchuria with the 91st Infantry Regiment. But he got there too late. The War was over.'

'We saw him again at Reval in 1906,' said the Baroness. 'The fleet was moored in the bay, and one day Roman swam out to the ships. He was a fine swimmer. In the Far East, he once swam across the River Amur, hand over hand.'

'It was in that same year, 1906,' the old man went on, 'that Roman—he was then just under twenty-one—was admitted to the Paul I Infantry College. He grad—'

uated from it in 1909, when—at last!—he obtained a commission. At his own request, he was drafted to a Cossack regiment at Chita, with the rank of second cornet. He left the regiment

‘Ferdinand,’ said his wife, ‘you’re forgetting the story of the sabre-cut’

The Baron hesitated again

‘My wife,’ he told me, ‘is referring to a quarrel which Roman had at Chita with one of his comrades, who gave him a nasty cut over the head with a sabre. It was after that business that he had to leave the place. He set off on horseback, accompanied only by his dog, across unexplored country, like a regular hero of legend. After that, he went back to the army, in another regiment’

‘So he got to know that part of the world well?’

‘He had a lot to say about it when he came to stay with us on leave in 1912. His family had persuaded him to travel abroad. Roman visited Austria, Germany, and France. He came back pretty disgusted, and in the spring of that year he went back to Siberia. The news of the war surprised him in Mongolia. He returned to Russia at once, and his one idea was to get to the front. He took part, to begin with, in Rennenkampf’s famous retreat. In a short time he became noted for his gallantry. He was awarded the Order of Saint George of the 4th class, the Order of Saint Vladimir of the 4th class surmounted by swords, and the Order of Saint Stanislas of the 3rd class’

The Baron paused.

‘...also surmounted by swords,’ he wound up

‘He was wounded five times,’ added his wife. ‘His cloak was riddled like a sieve’

‘We saw him once more,’ the old man took up the tale. ‘He returned to his family in October, 1917. He was ill, but he had kept his sword and his epaulets. In December he said good-bye to us and set off for Siberia

There he proposed to raise Buriat detachments and carry on the struggle against the Bolsheviks. He wrote once to his family, from Irkutsk. That was the last they heard of him.

The servant came in with a tray. The Baroness poured out tea.

'What was he like as a child?' I asked.

'Very wild,' said my host.

'And a liar like his father,' added his wife.

'Wait a moment,' said the Baron. 'There's no denying that Roman sometimes treated the truth in a very offhand way, but, from that to calling him a liar—'

'Sophia Charlotta,' the Baroness interrupted, 'gave up forbidding him to do anything. If she did, he promptly found something else just as bad. But I must say that Roman was always a perfect gentleman towards women.'

'Young men of the present day—and I'm talking about our best families—' went on the Baron, 'are good company, well brought up, and anything else you like. But, cutting across all these good qualities, there is something like a bar sinister which reduces their best aspirations to a nullity. In the midst of all these alerions, Roman always gave me the impression of an eagle essorant.'

'I beg your pardon.'

'Oh, you must excuse my symbolism. In heraldic language, an alerion is an eagle without beak or feet.'

'And what did you say then? An eagle?'

'Eссорant. In other words, ready to fly away,' explained the Baron, patiently.

'I see. And how do you explain that?'

Without saying a word, the Baron got up, crossed the room, and planted himself in front of the escutcheon of the Ungerns.

'There is the explanation,' he said. 'Bear in mind that the Ungern family goes back to the beginning of the thirteenth century, and doubtless much earlier. Ivan the

Terrible talks in his dispatches about the famous Livonian *condottiero* Claus Ungern, lieutenant of the King of Denmark, who defended Estland and the island of Oesel against the Russians, and later Danzig against the Poles. One of Catherine the Great's generals was named Ungern-Sternberg. When the Empress's son Bobrinski threatened to turn out badly, she married him off to a Demoiselle Ungern, who was this general's niece. In 1740, Marshal Matthias Alexander, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, commanded the Swedish forces against the Russians. Renauld von Ungern-Sternberg was Charles XII's master of the hounds, and twice entertained Peter the Great on his estate at Linden. There is on record a charming letter, dated 1710, I think, which Renauld wrote to his wife—she was a Pahlen by birth—to tell her about the Russian Sovereign's impending arrival. "*Mein eigen Herz*," he began, "My dear heart." A spicy letter, whose style recalls that of Princess Liselotte of the Palatinate. And all the other Ungerns.

I took notes in silence.

'But what about the man himself?' I asked, at length.

'How do you mean?'

'What about his tastes, his likes and dislikes?'

'He was very superstitious, and fond of animals, mathematics, philosophy, and, above all, war.'

'Was he religious?'

'He was a Protestant. It is said that later he embraced Buddhism. About that you might ask Count Hermann Keyserling.'

'The philosopher?'

'Yes. He's of Baltic origin, too. His sister married Roman's brother. He knew Roman well.'

'And what about Ungern's political views?'

'Naturally, he was an aristocrat and a monarchist.'

'And now.' I hesitated for a moment. 'I don't quite know how to put it. Well, you know, don't

you, that Ungern afterwards received the nickname of the "Bloody Baron?"

'Yes,' admitted the old man

'And do you know the reason?"

'No, I don't'

'Yes, you do, Ferdinand,' said the old lady

'Then how do you explain it? By his past, too?"

The Baron kept silent

'In heraldry,' he said, at length, 'the sheep is always represented passant, with its head down, as though it were grazing. As for the lion, one generally sees it standing on its hind legs. There was nothing of the sheep about Roman

'You think the comparison is applicable?"

'There are some things,' the old man went on, avoiding my question, 'which one can't explain. Can you tell me why the heraldic ostrich is always represented holding a horse-shoe, points downwards, in its beak? You can't, can you? It just is so'

He was dodging me, and he was also dodging some hurtful memory. He went on exercising it by throwing the whole arsenal of the dead language of heraldry at me, pales and fasces and pairles, as though they were so many spells. I couldn't follow him in this field of or and azure

'You knew Ungern in his cradle. You saw him when he was quite small

The old lady let herself be caught by what I said

'He had chubby little fists,' she said, 'and lain down on his head . . .'

'And then,' I went on, 'he learnt to laugh, to talk, to walk

'He waddled like a duck, and fell down every three steps . . .'

'And that pink-and-white child you knew . . . ' I said, slowly, and then I went on, very quickly 'Can you see

him putting out people's eyes, cutting off their ears, sticking

The old man, less courageous than his wife, interrupted me

'At school,' he said, 'Roman was a terror to his fellow-pupils and his masters. Several of the pupils' mothers forbade their sons to speak to him. Roman took his revenge. He got into the habit of throwing his school-books out of the window in the middle of lessons, running out after them, and not coming back. His masters didn't dare to complain. One day, the sports-master asked Roman "Look here, what do you think you'll be able to do in life?" "If all else fails," replied Roman, "I can always become a sports-master." After that, he was expelled.'

Once again Ungern was escaping me. 'The Bloody Baron' resumed his place in the drawing-room reduced to the dimensions of a mischievous schoolboy.

'But do you think that suffices to explain his actions?' I persisted. 'As a matter of fact, I've heard that some of his family were killed by the Bolsheviks.'

'No, that's not true,' said the Baron. 'None of his family was killed.'

'But wasn't his wife? . . .'

'Why, Roman never had one!'

'Then what other explanation is there?'

'What about the sabre-cut he received in his youth?'

'Is it likely that it wouldn't show any effects until ten years later?' But I must say that your first explanation—heredity—strikes me as to some extent sound. A taste for torture

'No, no!' exclaimed the Baron. 'You misunderstood me. The Ungerns are one of the most high-minded of Baltic families.'

To stop me answering him, he went on talking rapidly.

'Now that I come to think of it, I'm not sure whether I knew Roman very well. Sometimes he was cold and

formal. At other times—with his grandmother Wimpffen, for example—he was affectionate and full of consideration. Then, a few moments later, he would fly into a rage.

The Baron thought for a moment or two before he went on.

‘The division which is to be found in the middle of the escutcheon,’ he said, at length, and I realized that I should get nothing more out of him—‘the centre part of it, is called indifferently either the heart or the chasm. You see what I mean, I was talking about it just now. In the arms of the Ungerns, the shield azure with the star or is placed in the centre, in the heart or in the chasm. Well, I don’t know which of those three words best suited Roman.’

‘Yes,’ he repeated, ‘I’m still left wondering. His picture isn’t clear to me.’

I turned towards the Baroness.

‘And to you, Madame?’

‘Oh, yes,’ she replied, ‘his picture is quite clear to me. He was a lovely baby, and I was so proud when Sophia Charlotta let me hold him in my arms.’

I CROSSED the boulevard Montparnasse, turned into the rue Vavin, and pushed open a door, which closed behind me

I found myself in Russia a sterile, out-of-date Russia which lived on inexact letter-heads and memories. An advertisement on the wall announced that the Pavlograd Hussars were holding their annual ball next Saturday, and cordially invited all their old comrades in arms to attend and bring their families with them. Pots of salted cucumber and red caviar were arranged on the counters. 'I'm dancing with tears in my eyes', sobbed the loud-speaker. Two waiters were talking in undertones. One of them wore pince-nez, and his flabby cheeks were covered with grey stubble. Under his white jacket the other had preserved the automatic action of standing to attention. His former arrogance mingled with a new-found servility.

'How much money in the till?' asked the older man.

'Two hundred and forty francs,' replied the younger.

'I hope your family are quite well,' remarked the cashier, as she handed back some change.

'Two teas!' shouted another waiter. Then he leant over the counter. 'I can recommend the honey. It's real Russian honey.'

'Does it come from Russia?' asked the customer.

'No, but it's made by a Russian colonel in Montargis.'

'Thank you very much,' simpered the cashier.

'... 'cause the girl in my arms isn't you,' crooned the loud-speaker.

I knew one of the waiters. He was a native of Harbin.

He was too young to have taken part in the civil war, but I was under no illusions about his sympathies. I counted on getting some information through him.

'At your service,' he said. 'Always ready to oblige.' Then he darted off to attend to a lady customer, who, with a languishing air, asked him for an Olivier salad.

'I know several members of Kolkhak's Government,' he went on, when he came back to me.

I interrupted him to say that I was not so much interested in civilians as in soldiers, the more particularly in those who had fought under the command of Semionov and Ungern.

'Why, of course!' he exclaimed, and I almost expected to see a Sam Browne belt appear over his white jacket. 'One Olivier salad!' he shouted. 'I know lots of officers.' His boyhood's memories rose to the surface—memories interspersed with shots and the click of spurs. 'Volodka Steklianov is the man you want. Go and see Volodka Steklianov.'

'Your fingers are scented with incense,' lisped Vertinski's shrill voice from the loud-speaker.

'Volodka Steklianov fought under Ungern. He's a night taxi-driver. I saw him here the other evening.'

The waiter turned his head and murmured, in a coaxing tone of voice:

'Mischa, you swine, what about that Olivier salad of mine?'

'He used to live in the rue Blomet,' he went on, 'but I don't know where he's living now. We had a bit of a row recently.'

'And sadness sleeps in your eyes,' Vertinski bleated sentimentally. I reflected that, as he came out on the stage every evening, that powdered man brought with him a score of years of schoolgirls' adoration.

'He's a hothead, a regular *bashibazouk*. He used to be up to tricks . . . But the waiter's tone was admiring

A hatch opened in the wall, and a hairy wrist emerged. Black nails grasped the edge of a radish-dish on which a sticky *sauce vert* wobbled.

'You'll find Russian taxis outside. You've only to ask for Volodka's address. All of them know one another.'

The waiter clicked his heels and bowed his well-developed body very slightly. He went in for sports, and flirted with the restaurant's lady customers with breezy playfulness.

I went out into the street, and at once two shadows detached themselves from the wall and followed me.

'Alms for an old major!' said one of them.

'Alms for an old sailor!' said the other.

The shadows spoke Russian. I didn't turn round.

'Alms for an old major, alms for an old sailor!' they kept on in chorus. They said the same words over and over again, automatically, without any expression. Then the shadow of the old sailor growled at the shadow of the old major.

'Aren't you ashamed to beg?'

'What about yourself?'

'It's all right for a sailor, but it's a disgrace for a major.'

I reached the boulevard Montparnasse.

I hunted for Steklianov as though he were Ungern himself. In Grenelle and Montmartre, I walked along rows of taxis, staring at their drowsy, taciturn drivers, whose daily reading of *Latest News* and *Renaissance* provided them with motives for existence which had ceased to apply to them. The legend that the country whose language they still talked was not yet dead served as their sole drug. Their development, like that of backward children, had stopped in 1917.

When they changed their country, they had also changed their class. They had done their best to stick together.

through officers' clubs and regional clubs. But, by dint of wage-cuts, lock-outs, and sympathetic strikes, life had thrown them one and all into the arms of the taxi-drivers' union.

I went and waited outside night-restaurants, where I was sometimes rewarded by seeing a driver jump down from his seat and kiss his lady fare's hand. I ate in taverns in the rue Duplex and the rue Fondary. I hailed roving taxis at night; but when, instead of giving an address, I mentioned a man's name, the driver went off disappointed and I resumed my futile round.

One night, though I had abandoned all hope, to keep my conscience clear I questioned the drivers of the taxis lined up outside the Moulin-Rouge. The last but one in the row replied, quietly

'Yes, I saw him last night.'

'Could you give me his address?'

The taxi-driver, who was rolling a cigarette, favoured me with a steady stare. Evidently I didn't look like either a dun or a detective. He flicked his tongue over the paper, stuck the cigarette in a holder, and gave me the name of a hotel in the rue Fontaine.

I proceeded to pay a visit to the man who called himself Stekljanov. I knew him by his real name, because I had come across it in newspapers and memoirs of the civil war period.

At that time he was a young man. He commanded the Whites' armoured trains: those trains which served as places of execution, depots for stolen property, and brothels. Every day, for years and years, Colonel Stekljanov killed and ordered killings. If he had been taken prisoner, he would have been shot without trial, not so much out of revenge as because the only way of getting the better of him was to restore to nature the hydrogen, the oxygen, and the carbon which made up his body.

Now he had a home, an identity-card, and a driving-

licence, and in a few minutes I should be in his presence

'First floor, number eight,' I was told by a servant whom I managed to unearth

I knocked at the door. There was no reply. I turned the key, which had been left in the lock, and walked in.

The room was furnished with four armchairs upholstered in blue-green plush. Opposite the door was a walnut dressing-table with an oval mirror and scrolled shelves. Over it, in a frame, hung a head of Christ, with its eyes closed, crowned with thorns and bleeding, and bearing gilt lettering: 'If you watch the eyes closely, they will open.' On the wall were two photographs: one of a woman in a low-cut dress, and the other of a man decked out in the cap of a Czarist civil engineer, and swimming in a silky beard and a big otter collar. On the mantelpiece two black elephants mounted guard on either side of a withered spray of mimosa.

To the right was a double divan-bed, adorned with cushions and two dolls: a pierrot and a gipsy. In the middle of the divan a man lay asleep, half-undressed. The room was inhabited, after all.

The man had a flat, broad face, with a small, turned-up nose, and he was pitted with small-pox. He slept with his mouth open, and his Adam's apple stuck out.

I went back to the door.

'Steklianov,' I called, 'Colonel Steklianov! Wake up, colonel!'

He sat up with a start, propping himself on the divan with both hands, and looked round him vaguely. Through his unbuttoned shirt, I could catch a glimpse of his chest, covered with reddish hair.

'Colonel Steklianov?' I repeated.

'What do you want?' he asked.

He spoke in French with a Russian accent.

I answered in Russian.

'I have come to ask you to do me a great service '

He stared at me suspiciously

'Don't be alarmed,' I said, quickly 'All I want you to do is tell me your recollections '

He yawned and passed his hand over his face, but he kept on watching me through his spread-out fingers

'What recollections?' he asked, slowly, picking his teeth with his little finger

'Well, I'm writing a book about the Far East in 1918 to 1921 So, you see, I'm looking for people who were out there at the time and who might give me information about it '

I paused Steklianov waited

'I learnt by chance that you were in Paris As I have often come across your name in the course of my studies, I said to myself that nobody could be better placed than yourself '

'What kind of book are you writing?'

'I hardly know how to put it A novel, more or less '

'Not an historical book?'

'Oh no!'

'What's this novel of yours all about?'

'I'm making up the characters '

'What do you mean?'

'They're imaginary people, I mean '

'Not men who really lived, eh?'

'I'm trying to make them as life-like as possible. It's a question of luck '

'I don't understand you '

'If you prefer to put it that way, it's a question of talent '

'Oh, I see '

'I'm counting precisely on you to help me to be true to life '

Either he misunderstood me, or he didn't believe me.

'No,' he said, 'no, I can't help you. It's all so long ago. I've forgotten all about it.'

He lay down again and closed his eyes. But he wasn't asleep. I could see his face working a little.

'Are you Russian?' he asked me, suddenly.

'No, I'm French. But I've lived in Russia.'

'In the Far East?'

'No. In Petersburg.'

Obviously he was making calculations.

'And who told you that I was in Paris?'

'I heard it through a colleague of yours.'

'An officer?'

I had put my foot in it.

'No, a taxi-driver. I don't know what he was before.'

'You're not going to put anything about me in your book?'

'Of course I'm not.'

'Well, in that case, I can't see what you want with me.'

Either he couldn't see, or he wouldn't see. I started my explanation all over again. Into every second sentence I shoved the word 'Colonel'.

'Oh, you needn't bother to call me that now,' he said. Then he noticed me glancing at the nail-scissors and files lying on the dressing-table.

'My wife isn't here,' he went on. 'She works in the daytime.'

'Are you expecting her?'

'No, I've got to go out.' He paused for a moment or two. 'She couldn't tell you anything. She's never been in the Far East. I married her here.'

'Must you go out already?'

Stekhanov put on his collar and tie. Then he bent down to lace his shoes. He got red at the back of the neck.

'You can come with me, if you like.'

He went over to the door and opened it for me, as though it were the door of a taxi

'I must go to my garage,' he said

'Come and have a drink first'

We sat down on a café terrace. Stekhanov studied me once more

'After all,' he said, 'after all'

I said nothing

'Mine's a beer,' said Stekhanov, and in his turn he relapsed into silence. An electric lamp lit up his face and filled the pockmarks in it with shadows

'After all,' he repeated, without looking at me. Then he turned towards me

'All right. Ask me any questions you like'

'Tell me about your comrades'

'You mean my brother-officers?'

'Yes. The ones who were at Dauria with Ungern'

'Well, there was General Rezuikhin'

'An elderly man, wasn't he?'

'Yes, he was no chicken. He happened to be in Harbin after the revolution, but he didn't stay there. He got into trouble'

'What sort of trouble?'

'Oh, all sorts of trouble. He was fond of gambling. So you see . . .'

'And who else was there?'

'There was Colonel Laurenz. He was in command at Dauria. I suppose he must have been about forty-five, or forty-seven, say. He was very smart, very well turned-out'

'A slim fellow, wasn't he?'

'Yes. Looked as though he were poured into his uniform. There was a pal of his, too, Lieutenant Issak. I believe they'd known each other before the war—in Moscow, I suppose. Then there was Captain Makeev'

'What was he like?'

'Taller than Laurenz, but rather younger—though I'm

not sure about that—rather stout, with a bulbous nose

‘And what about his eyes?’

‘They were blue, and flush with his face’

‘And what sort of mouth?’

‘A slack one’

‘All right And who else?’

‘Then there was Zabiakin, a lieutenant He filled in for Laurencz when he was away D’you want a portrait of him, too?’

‘Yes, please’

‘He had a head like a sugar-loaf, and he was clean shaven His complexion was rather yellow That’s all about him, I think Then there was Chernov He had a black beard He got on badly with Zabiakin’

‘Anybody else?’

‘No Oh, yes, I was forgetting Burdukovski Ever hear of him?’

‘No Why should I?’

‘He was in charge of executions’

Steklianov emptied his glass, and shot a knowing glance at me

‘His photo, too, ch? Well, he was small, stout, forehead average, nose average, mouth average, chin round, face oval, distinguishing marks none Got him? Good Well, is that enough for you?’

‘Yes, if that’s everybody But wasn’t there a Colonel Sipailov?’

‘Sipailov the Strangler? Oh, yes, of course there was’

‘Why the Strangler?’

Steklianov laid hands on the carafe of water on the table, put his fingers round the neck of it, closed his grip, clicked his tongue, and winked at me

‘Got that?’

‘Fond of drinking, was he?’

‘God, you’re slow! Well, after all, I can’t’

He stretched out his arm, and his thumb brushed against my neck

'Now have you got it?'

He broke into a laugh. Then, without further ado, he went on

'I must go and get that 'bus of mine.'

We made our way to the garage. Stekhanov sat down at the wheel of an antiquated taxi. I took the seat beside him, and we set off.

'Tell me about Ungern,' I said.

'The Baron?'

'Yes. How did he become a general?'

'He was promoted by Semionov. He was in command of a division, but he never accepted either the ataman's authority or Kolchak's. He established himself at Dauria, and you may take my word for it that nobody ever went to see what he was doing there. Everybody was afraid of him. People called him "the Czar of Dauria" or "the god of Dauria." We officers went to ground as soon as we caught sight of him. He was quite capable of talking to you nicely, and then shooting you out of hand. Some of his officers deserted him and went and enlisted with Kolchak or Semionov. A little later the Baron let it be known that supplementary pay was due to any of the officers who had left him if they presented themselves at Dauria. A few of them turned up. Ungern put them into prison. He left them there three days. The Baron liked stringing out his amusement. He went to see them. He talked to them like comrades. He promised to let them go the next day. That very night he had all of them shot.'

As Stekhanov talked, he kept his eyes open for fares. We took two men to the Opera, two others to the Gare du Nord, and a man and a woman to an hotel. After every journey we looked to see whether the fares had left anything behind them in the taxi. Then we went and

had a drink. As it got later our fares stared suspiciously at the second person sitting beside the driver.

'He lived all alone, the Baron,' said Steklianov. 'He never received anybody except clairvoyants and fortune-tellers. He was scarcely ever seen at Semionov's headquarters at Chita. He never went to a theatre, never to a restaurant, never to a brothel. One story had it that he was married to a Chinese prince's daughter, while other people said that he was virgin. Really, he wasn't a very interesting person.'

We drove slowly alongside the sidewalk. The streets were emptying.

'Semionov was terribly afraid of Ungern,' Steklianov went on. 'For example, now I come to think of it, Semionov had a tart named Machka. She was a cabaret singer, a whore in short. The Baron didn't like her. He told Semionov that he must get rid of her, and the ataman sent her to Japan. There she was sure of a welcome. I went there myself later on, with Semionov, after it was all over. The Baron stayed behind.'

Steklianov stared at his hands, resting on the steering-wheel, and remarked, in an astonished tone of voice:

'Just imagine that it's only ten years ago!'

'Was everybody afraid of Ungern?' I asked.

'I've just mentioned Japan to you,' replied Steklianov. 'Well, there was a Japanese, Captain Sudzuki. He wasn't afraid of Ungern. Whenever he came to Dauria, he used to shut himself up with the Baron for hours. Ungern gave strict orders they weren't to be disturbed on any account.'

Steklianov smiled.

'I can't give you a description of him. All Japanese look alike. Sudzuki was small and slim, but so are all of them. I never heard him speak. The Baron used to go and meet him at the station and drive him back there. . '

We picked up a fare who was bare-headed, with a coat pulled on over his nightshirt. He took us to fetch a doctor.

and a priest. The man of science carried an instrument-case, and the man of God carried an umbrella. Then we had something to warm us at a tavern in the boulevard Sébastopol.

"Two coffees here!" shouted the waiter, putting a lump of sugar and a pewter spoon into each of our chipped glasses.

"We were betrayed," said Steklianov. "We might have exterminated the Bolsheviks, but we were betrayed. Everybody betrayed us—the Jews, and the British, and the Czechs, and the French. To-day they lick the Soviet's boots. It's disgusting. They made us beat it and turn ourselves into taxi-drivers. For my part, I was a colonel—a colonel, let me tell you! I was in command of armoured trains."

We started off again. My companion changed gears clumsily. We drove at full speed to the Seine and went up the boulevard Saint-Michel.

"Armoured trains," repeated Steklianov. "I was in command of them. And I was *milord* the Colonel, and all those people grovelled on their faces in front of me because I could kill them on the spot."

But he didn't say "kill them," he said "write them off." The jargon of the civil war came to his lips again. We went past the Invalides, and crossed the Seine again. All at once Steklianov stopped the car.

"I've had enough of this," he said. "I'm going to stay here."

"Let's go back," I suggested. "I'll drive."

We changed places. I drove back towards Montmartre. Steklianov said nothing. He was drowsy.

We reached his hotel. The door, with its notice "Rooms by the day or the hour", stood ajar. We went up the lighted staircase. From inside the locked doors sighing and panting were heard. I thought about Steklianov's wife, whom we should awaken.

But there was nobody in his room The bed-clothes were not turned down Steklianov slumped into a chair In its corner, the Christ bled artistically

'I know all about it,' shouted Steklianov, so suddenly that I jumped 'I've been watching you all the time You thought you were taking me in, but it's not so easy as all that, my boy You're no Frenchman You're a Russian, and you were sent here to spy on me The OGPU sent you You're afraid of me, and you want to get rid of me, just as you got rid of Koutepov You belong to the OGPU I say you belong to the OGPU,' he wound up, in an astonished tone of voice, 'and you don't even deny it'

I was too lazy to tell him that his charge didn't annoy me, but that it was simply untrue Then I waited

'Colonel Steklianov, taxi-driver,' he said, pensively 'Yes, that's me All my fares are Jews, and so are you We hadn't time to liquidate the lot of you'

He was drunk I knew that in a moment or two he would let himself go I waited

Steklianov went across to the wash-basin, and had a drink straight out of the tap The water ran down his face and his chest He took off his coat, unbuttoned his shirt, and sat down again

'Hullo, are you still there?' he said, and he giggled like a schoolgirl

'Steklianov,' I said, 'you are a man like myself or anybody else You have a wife, and you eat and drink You empty your crank-case every three thousand kilometres. You hang family portraits and an ikon on your walls But you're a butcher, Steklianov, a butcher and a murderer'

He kept silent for a moment or two Then he said

'I'm a soldier', and he giggled again

'With all your armoured trains,' I went on, 'did you ever fight the Red Army? Did you ever even set eyes on it? You didn't, did you?'

'One day,' he said, 'they sent me some prisoners. More than three hundred prisoners. All civilians. I hadn't got any food for them. I took them to a field a mile or so outside the town in an armoured train, I ordered them out, and I turned machine-guns on them. We had to let a train pass, so we pulled into a siding. Then we went back and finished off the wounded. I remember that. It was out Adrianovka way.'

He spoke in an indifferent, flat tone of voice, as though he were repeating a lesson.

'And it doesn't mean anything to you to remember a thing like that?' I demanded.

'No, nothing at all. Why should it?'

'Nothing at all, you say?'

'Nothing whatever.'

Then he went on:

'We used to dine in a restaurant at Chita. Then we went to the prison. We wakened a prisoner. We tied him up by his private parts to the door-handle, so as to keep him on tip-toe, and then we hit him over the head with a piece of wood. After that, we went back to the restaurant.'

He was still talking quite simply and quietly.

'And you think that was a good thing to do?' I demanded.

'No, I don't.'

'Then do you think it was a bad thing?'

'No, I don't.'

We kept silent. Then, all at once, Stekhanov became animated.

'Do you know one thing Ungern thought of doing?' he said. 'We used to undress a prisoner, a Communist. We stuck a tin bucket on his belly. Inside the bucket we let a rat loose. Then we tapped on the outside with a stick. That didn't do the prisoner any harm, but it frightened the rat and made it start looking for a way out. It ran up

and down It couldn't get out It tried biting the tin, but it found the man's body softer The man was tied down, and he couldn't stir That went on for two or three hours—never more'

'Mirabeau mentions that in one of his books'

'Mirabeau? Never heard of him If he does, he's just showing off It was the Baron who invented that dodge'

'But why was all this? For the Czar? For faith? For Fatherland?'

Stekhanov made no reply

'Were any of your family killed by the Bolsheviks? Did they rob you of your estate, your home?'

'No, not mine Other people's'

He seemed to be thinking things over

'I went to the front when I was seventeen,' he said 'I couldn't do anything with my hands, or with my brains, either So I went on fighting Whenever I set eyes on a prisoner, it was too much for me I always used to carry a knife in my pocket If normal life had started again, we should only have had a choice between blowing our brains out or going mad That's what I used to think'

'You've still got that choice'

'It's too late now I never think about those things, or very seldom'

I made a last effort

'You did a bad job, Colonel The children of your victims have grown up They have created the U S S R You see what I mean, Colonel? Have you ever seen French workers holding a demonstration? Have you ever heard them singing? Haven't you recognized the tune, the words? They're the same—the same all over the world'

'Maybe,' murmured Steiklanov, 'maybe'

I went over to him He was asleep in his chair, with his arms dangling and his chin sunk in his chest

I went home amid all the clatter of garbage-pails and

the early trams At the corner of my street, a rat was rummaging peacefully inside a bucket bursting with filth I kicked the outside of the bucket, and the animal fled It was a grey, commonplace rat— a peace-time rat

My janitress stopped me and handed me an envelope It contained a letter from Baron T, consisting only of a few words 'We thought you might like to have this little piece of testimony' A rectangle of cardboard dropped out of the letter

On it was mounted the photograph of a child of twenty months He was clad in a festooned dress His fleshy lips drooped at the corners His straight hair fell about his shoulders On his forehead it was cut in a fringe level with his scanty eyebrows His eyes were underlined by two puckers such as you see in very chubby babies They looked out, dull, grave, indifferent

On the back of the photo I read
'Roman Ungern-Sternberg'.

I HAD written right and left, and replies started pouring in

From Harbin, somebody called Kovgan, author of *Memoirs of an Ignoramus*—a superfluous confession—wrote to me

‘I am an observer of nature, though I do not possess a very wide horizon, and I delight in throwing light on all the facts of life and its failings, for such is our one hope of salvation’

From Moscow, Vsevolod Ivanov, who himself had fought against the Whites in the Far East, informed me that he was sending me some books which might interest me. From Rcvál I received details of Ungern’s military service

Maxim Gorky, who was then living at Sorrento, had found time to ask a Siberian novelist for some documentation about the Baron, and hoped to receive it and forward it to me shortly

One correspondent drew my attention to a collection of sources to be found in the Congressional Library in Washington. Another informed me that a member of Kolchak’s Government was in Paris, where he ran a dressmaking establishment. But his Excellency, all wrapped up in his finery, refused to see me. Meanwhile I had got about all the printed testimony I wanted

One day, I received a letter more definite than the others, which filled me with delight for a whole afternoon. It was from Count Hermann Keyserling, and read as follows

'MY DEAR SIR,

'It is only to-day that I have at last found time to reply to your request for some information about Baron Roman Ungern-Sternberg

'He was certainly the most remarkable person I have ever had the good fortune to meet. One day I said to his grandmother, Baroness Wimpffen "He is a creature whom one might call suspended between Heaven and Hell, without the least understanding of the laws of this world." He presented a really extraordinary mixture of the most profound aptitude for metaphysics and of cruelty. So he was positively predestined for Mongolia (where such discord in a man is the rule), and there, in fact, his fate led him

'During the World War and the revolution I spent whole nights in conversation with Roman. Fundamentally, he was incapable of thinking. When I pressed him, he burst out "Don't force me to think. Thought comes and goes like a breeze." Even when he was at school, he used to say "Thinking is a piece of cowardice."

'At the same time, he possessed personally the gift of second-sight, and, in addition, he had his share of the faculty of prophecy. He was the first to foretell, to my very great astonishment, my ultimate career. At that time, I was a contemplative, aloof from the world. Ungern said to me "I see you in the future leading armies and launching attacks." Such, in fact, was what I afterwards did, when I started going from one nation to another to teach them wisdom.

'His metaphysical ideas were closely related to those of the Tibetans and the Hindus. He was not of this world, and I cannot help thinking that on this earth he was only a passing guest.

'You may quote what I say in my own words. In return, I shall ask you for a copy of your book.

'With my best regards,

'Yours sincerely,

'HERMANN KEYSERLING'

The same mail brought me a note from Cendrars

'MY DEAR FELLOW,

'I find the enclosed story in a newspaper. It may interest you for your *Ungern*.

'MY FRIENDLY HAND'

The story was sloppy and conventional. Its author had

tried to write it up His daily handling of telegrams, with their terse style, had taught him nothing It had three headings on top, 'Poor lad', in the middle, 'A Buddhist monk in Paris', at the bottom, 'In Brother Vahindra's garret'

Cendrars had marked a passage

'In 1920 the persecuted monk became the spiritual adviser of Baron Ungern, who for the time being was master of Mongolia Ossendowski has drawn a striking portrait of him in *Beasts, Men and Gods*

'Just before his death the Baron said to Vahindra

'"I have a son in Esthonia, in such-and-such a place Seek him out, and bring him up in the Buddhist religion"

'Impassively, Baron Ungern's son proceeded to translate this extraordinary story

The mere mention of Ossendowski's name was in itself pretty suspicious Still, I was bound to see this Buddhist monk, who called himself the spiritual adviser of a man who had never taken advice from anybody except the Japanese General Staff

Brother Vahindra lived in a shabby lodging-house near the Place Maubert not far away from the hotel in which the European Bureau of the Kuomintang, installed in two cramped back rooms, was at the moment busy betraying the Chinese revolution

I went up a whitewashed staircase, from which the paint was scaling off It was so crooked that I had to hold on to the banister The treads groaned under my feet I stopped at a door

At first I could hear nothing Then I made out wheezy breathing, interrupted by the creaking of a bed I decided to knock Almost at once there sounded an uncertain, colourless voice reciting something I knocked again 'Come in', said the same voice, stopping its reading. I turned the handle

A tall man stood in the middle of the room, looking

towards the door. His head was bald and shiny, and a tawny beard streamed down his chest and merged into his red habit, a lama's cloak, which stopped short flush with his big, bare feet, blue-veined and with knobby toes. Those feet, pallid and unnaturally clean, made me feel slightly sick.

The man stared at me in silence, with his little, ferrety eyes running from side to side. Obviously he didn't receive many visitors.

'Sir?' said an interrogative voice, and a boy came forward from behind Vahindra. I took him to be the person who had been reciting just now. He looked about sixteen or seventeen. His suit, which was otherwise too big for him but short in the sleeves, seemed to embarrass him. His face was pale and flabby, and everything about it sagged: the corners of his mouth, the ends of his eyebrows.

He, too, stared at me in silence, now and again shooting little, fearful glances at Vahindra. When he did so, his violet-hued eyelids flickered slightly.

I explained the object of my visit. As I spoke, the expectant expression on the monk's face changed to one of complacency. I mentioned my name. He asked whether I spoke Russian, and from his accent I identified him as a native of one of the Baltic lands: probably a Lett rather than an Estonian.

'So you knew Ungern?' I asked, as I sat down.

Vahindra sat down in his turn. He laid his plump, soft hands, which looked like those of a middle-aged woman, one on top of the other.

'I knew him very well,' he declared.

That was the one definite statement I got out of him.

I put my notebook away, for he told me that he could not stand the sight of a pen running over paper. I asked him the most innocent questions. He kept silent for a moment or two before making up his mind to reply. The

instinctive trickiness of a pig-headed peasant seeped out in his tone of voice

'Since the Baron's death,' I remarked, 'Mongolia'

'The Baron is not dead,' the monk interrupted me, severely 'He abandoned his remains and reincarnated himself in the body of a Mongol To-day he is ten years old The Chinese and the Russians are searching for him in order to kill him Poor fools! They imagine that by killing him they will stop him reincarnating himself again But they won't even find him He is well hidden, and only three lamas can approach him In five years and seven months he will resume his ride across the Gobi Desert, and nobody will be able to resist him'

I recalled a sentence in Keyserling's letter 'I see you in the future leading armies and launching attacks' The comparison was only too obvious

Complacently contemplating those indecently bare hands of his, the monk manœuvred, advancing and retreating Coppery gleams swarmed in his beard Not once did he let me catch him in the very act of lying

I asked him whether Ungern had embraced Buddhism

'One does not become a convert to Buddhism,' he replied 'Either one is a Buddhist, or one is not'

I inquired whether Vahindra had ever been in Urga, the capital of Mongolia He replied that he had 'also' been in Urga

Then I questioned him about the Baron's political and religious views

'We discussed them at length,' said the monk, and, with an expression which registered deliberate boredom, he looked out of the window

'But what about them?' I persisted 'Was he a monarchist? Did he aspire to create an empire? Did he ever mention Genghis Khan?'

'He admired all great warriors, from Napoleon to Genghis Khan'

In exasperation, I endeavoured not so much to inform myself as to confound Vahindra

‘What age would the Baron have been when you knew him?’

He hesitated a little.

‘The Mongols do not reckon a man’s age in the same way as we do’

‘But what would you say?’

‘The soul is immortal It reincarnates itself It might be a thousand years old’

‘But what age was Ungern’s body when you knew him?’

In his harsh, sing-song accent, the monk replied

‘He was a man of middle age He might have been fifty’

This time I had got him He was about fifteen years out

Vahindra must have realized that he had made a slip His replies became more and more wavering

During his pauses I had time to study the room It contained a brass double bed, with two pillows, a wardrobe with a mirror, two rickety chairs, a grey-blue flowered rug, wall-paper with red and gold flowers, and an imitation white-marble chimney-piece, surmounted by a tarnished mirror The usual dried grasses and family portraits were missing on the mantel, which was covered with a cloth Upon it two candles, such as you buy at cigar-stores burnt in front of a bust of Buddha, whose enigmatic smile had been fashioned in a Leipzig mould. Picture postcards were stuck up all round it, representing Napoleon as a lieutenant, Napoleon as consul, Napoleon as emperor, Napoleon as a corpse

Vahindra questioned me in his turn, cautiously but adroitly But I had no further use for him In a brothel, with a litre of alcohol in his belly, he would doubtless have plenty to say in the way of bragging and lying. Let him keep his stories for journalists I got up

The boy, who had not said a word, stared at me insistently

'I shall be very glad to see you again some day,' said I, addressing myself to the two of them, but fixing my eyes on the boy. He glanced at his companion, and once more I caught the quivering of his eyelids

Vahindra got up from the bed on which he was sitting, and the harsh creak of its springs broke the silence

I looked once more at the boy, noting the rings round his eyes sooty rings which ate into the creamy skin of his cheeks. I barely remembered that the monk passed him off as Ungern's son. I knew Ungern had died childless

I HAD to get to grips with my subject. In other words, I had to talk to somebody about it. I thought about Cendrars, but he was away. So I went to see Marie Anne, the very person for whose benefit I had invented an Ungern in glasses, in accordance with the approved recipe of the new psychology, which goes in for realistic details.

Marie Anne was paler than usual. She told me that for some time she had been sleeping badly. I reflected that it was several months since we had last met. She also told me that she was glad to see me—which promptly brought me to life, that she was going away soon, and that, generally speaking, she was very fond of me—which made me downcast.

Then, as though we had parted only the day before, she asked me what had become of that Baron. She couldn't remember his name.

I told her all about him: my meeting with the American journalist, my evening with Stekljanov, my correspondence, and all the rest of it. Marie Anne listened to me in silence.

'So far, so good,' she said, when I had finished. 'That's all about you. And now what about Ungern?'

'Eh?' said I.

'You've been telling me all about yourself. Now tell me about Ungern. Have you started writing?'

'Just a little.'

'And what have you written?'

'I've written about my meeting with Cendrars, my meeting with you, my research work.'

'*Your* meetings, *your* research work,' repeated Marie Anne, emphasizing the pronoun. She frowned 'No, no!'—and she raised her hand as though I were going to interrupt her—'that's not the way to write a novel.'

'Then what is the way?'

'The same as in *Alice in Wonderland*.'

Marie Anne smiled.

'“The White Rabbit put on his spectacles,”’ she quoted. “‘Where shall I begin, Your Majesty?’ he asked. ‘Begin at the beginning,’ said the King, gravely, ‘go on until you come to the end, and then stop.’”’

'That's just the mentality of a king,' I retorted. 'Do you think that, just because one is supposed to be a realist, one should follow chronological order, or that life does anything of the kind? When I first met you, you were twenty-five. It wasn't until much later that I learnt what you were like at sixteen, or at ten, or at five. It wasn't until much later that I heard about your first summer at the sea, or about your English lessons. I still don't know all sorts of things about you—three-quarters of them. Well, do you want me to go in for the restoring business? Do you want me to put bits together, replace those that are missing, and round off the joints? That's just faking antique furniture. You don't call that real life, do you? In Voltaire's time, what is now called a Voltaire chair was just called a chair. I'm no White Rabbit.'

'You're very hard on the White Rabbit,' said Marie Anne. 'He was very nice. I don't want to hurt you, but I doubt whether you'll ever write this novel of yours.'

'Yes, I'll write it, but perhaps it won't be a novel. If I wanted to go in for imitation, do you think I should have any difficulty about it? When I was sixteen, I was very good at pasticcio, but it doesn't amuse me any more. You'll remember that, the last time I came to see you, I told you about Ungern's life. I'd made it all up, from

beginning to end. But you swallowed it, because it reminded you of dozens of books all together, though it didn't remind you of a single living man. By now I'm more modest.

'That day you asked me some definite questions. I can answer them for you now. Ungern had a beard and moustache. He fought in Transbaikalia and Mongolia first against the Red irregulars, then against the Chinese, and finally against the Red army. He was a very good horseman. He was not fond of eating and drinking, nor was he fond of women. There are trees in Siberia—birch, aspen, alder, black poplar, savin, and wild cherry. There are birds in Siberia—pheasants, fly-snappers, swans, eagles, falcons, and hawks. Ungern never had any children.'

'That's a pity,' said Marie Anne, thoughtfully. 'You mustn't forget to say that it's most important. Another thing—what do you mean by Red irregulars?'

'Peasants in revolt.'

'Yes?'

Apparently she expected me to say something more. I didn't.

'But why were they in revolt?' she went on.

I remained mute. In my pursuit of details I had overlooked essentials. I couldn't count on my readers knowing the history of the civil war in Siberia. Taken by itself, the case of Ungern became incomprehensible. At most, in fact, it provided material for a psychological study.

'I'm quite right, you see,' said Marie Anne.

She got up and went over to the window.

'I'm very inquisitive,' she went on, 'and I want you to put down in chronological order—I insist upon that—everything that happened in Siberia. You know it already, but that doesn't in the least mean that other people know it. And that's that, Sir. I hope you'll take advantage of this lesson.'

As I was on my way out, she stopped me.

‘What are we going to call this bit of an essay?’ she asked

I replied that ‘A Few Pages of History’ seemed to me to meet the case perfectly For the first time that day Marie Anne and I found ourselves in agreement

SO HERE we have a few pages of history

I shall preface them with an extract from Admiral Kolchak's testimony at his trial

'On the other hand, a navy has much less need to complete its crew out of foreign elements, for, if a ship sinks, it sinks with all hands'

After paving the way for dictatorship, the Socialist-Revolutionary directorate was suppressed by a group of officers and replaced by Admiral Kolchak as 'Supreme Regent of Russia' His supremacy was recognized by the Archangel Government in the North and by General Denikin at his headquarters in the South Great Britain, France, Japan, and the United States promised effective assistance to the White armies, and kept their promise, to the great advantage of liquidators of war stocks Sixty thousand Japanese, eight thousand Americans, six thousand Canadians, one thousand French, fifteen hundred British, and the same number of Italians came to reinforce the fifty thousand Czechs, Poles, Roumanians, and Serbs whom the revolution had surprised in Siberia In short, Siberia was the one place where all the Allies fought side by side

Thus the ship of Czarist Restoration floated proudly on the waves of History It was, indeed, a flagship, and even the rats did not think of deserting it There was excellent fare for nibbling. Kolchak created ministries and departments, and an avalanche of official documents descended upon the continent At the foot of ordi-

nances, decrees, and decisions the rats recognized signatures on which they had not set eyes since 1917. A feverish activity took possession of everybody. The Ministry of Justice settled details of procedure, and meanwhile atamans roamed about in armoured trains, charging with Bolshevism any man worth robbing and any girl worth raping.

The Ministry of Finance created a new currency and negotiated loans, the dollar and the *yen* appreciated, manufacturers distributed bribes, gathered in orders, and credited their profits to their accounts in Paris, Tokio, and New York. Generals made speeches and ordered requisitions. Foreign advisers sent munitions and made speeches. Politicians got busy. Some of them, making no bones about it, spirited away the last survivors of the Romanov family. Others concerned themselves about the date of the future Constituent Assembly, through which, thanks to universal, direct, equal, and secret suffrage, the Russian people were at last to manifest their sovereign will.

Just where the Russian people were to be found it was difficult to say. To be sure, there were one hundred and twenty thousand men in the volunteer armies. There were as many in prisons and concentration camps. Others swung hanged from telegraph posts along the Trans-Siberian railway. Others again reposed in common graves which they had dug with their own hands before they were shot. Still others, conscripted and sent to the front, had deserted to the enemy. All these could be accounted for, but elsewhere the Russian people remained undiscoverable.

This, however, did not stop the newspapers from describing the popular enthusiasm which was manifested in patriotic gatherings. While the people thus demonstrated, somebody or other derailed troop-trains and munitions-trains, and massacred punitive expeditions which got lost in the forests.

Admiral Alexander Vassilievitch Kolchak in person steered his immense terrestrial ship, the biggest he had ever commanded 'The Russian Washington', as ex-Czarist Minister Sazonov nicknamed him, could see the time coming when he would be called to a still more exalted destiny. The Czar was dead, his family were scattered, and Kolchak awaited with confidence the decision of the Constituent Assembly, which, thanks to him, would hold its sessions at the Kremlin in Moscow. His generals assured him that the situation was excellent, and, as for civilians, he met them less and less often. Foreigners called him 'Your Excellency', the troops cheered him, and the papers sang his praises.

Many years earlier a member of a British armaments firm had paid a visit to the factory where Kolchak was then working, and had suggested to the young man that he should come to England and undergo a course of training in his firm. The plan fell through, but now the Supreme Regent could see guns arriving in Siberia which bore the same firm's trade-mark.

Admiral Kolchak had always had an affection for Great Britain.

To be sure, there were one or two unfortunate incidents. A month after Kolchak's elevation to power, the Communists organized a rising in Omsk, the Supreme Regent's capital, and slit the throats of a number of officers. The next day but one forty-two workers were shot at one o'clock in the morning. Three hours later a court-martial was assembled, found the insurgents guilty, and sentenced them to death, when their bodies were already cold.

At about the same time, at the theatre, some person or persons unknown threw a bomb into the box in which Semionov was sitting, but the ataman escaped with a fright.

A saying got into circulation. 'Siberia is too big, the

summer is too short, and the people are too democratic '
In the streets urchins sang

'English ways, Japanese goods, Russia for ever,
And of more than Omsk he'll be Regent never'

But all this did not count Nor did the fact that corners of sayings were almost more numerous than workmen, and that fewer and fewer children were being born, as was the case throughout Russia In 1911 there had been twenty-seven deaths and twenty-nine births per thousand In 1919 there were thirty births and seventy-five deaths

Nevertheless, the flagship of the Restoration, under full steam and flying the white-blue-red flag, advanced irresistibly towards the coveted goal Led by old generals who ignored the age-limit and young subalterns promoted to the rank of general, the White armies occupied all Siberia and crossed the frontier into Europe.

On March 13, 1919, Kolchak's troops entered Ufa In the course of the month of April they took possession of the metallurgical basin of the Urals Every day the papers announced that more towns had been taken A junction would soon be effected in the South with Denikin's forces, and in the North with General Miller's Then a united front would be established from the White Sea to the Black Sea, and the young Soviet republic, reduced to the dimensions of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, would find itself in the grip of a steel vice

To be sure, the British, nursing their sick, and the men of the Foreign Legion remained in the rear, thus bearing witness to prudent doubts about the future The Japanese had scarcely moved outside the limits of the Far East, where they spent their time studying topography and practising musketry with living targets The Americans had taken up their quarters in the mineral basin of Suchan, whose coal suited the boilers of the Pacific squadron to perfection Even the Czechs had soon got

sick of the career of arms and were manifesting an unsuspected taste for trade

Despite all this, the Allies' generosity, if not in men, at least in arms, money, and promises, was inexhaustible. The wind was favourable, and the cause of civilization seemed saved. The Paris *Temps*—and time, of course, means money—was able to say on its front page 'It is Kolchak, Denikin, and Yudenitch who appear to be the champions of the League of Nations'

A close and impartial observer, no doubt, might have noted one or two sinister hints. A certain number of shopkeepers left Omsk for Vladivostok. A mutiny broke out among the American soldiers stationed at the Suchan mines. Workmen in the town sang songs made up in the depths of the forests. Irregulars fired bullets manufactured in factory workshops. Never yet had the tone of the newspapers been so confident, so carefully composed. Never yet had they had so much to say about the victories daily won at the front. In this assurance itself a close and impartial observer would have found matter for reflection.

The first breath of the storm was quite soft, quite soothing. The most experienced mariners were misled by it. The atmosphere became heavier, more motionless. The silence became solidified. Nothing was to be heard but a vague lapping against the hull of the flagship. A definite sense of peace sank down weightily upon the surface of the waters, green, smooth, and still.

It was, let us say, five o'clock. In silence, the men on the bridge scanned the empty horizon. They strolled up and down. They looked over the side. Then they glanced up at the chronometer again. It was only two minutes past five. Yet they would have sworn that half an hour had meanwhile elapsed. At half-past five the cyclone swept down on the ship.

Kolchak had taken part in a Polar expedition, com-

manded the Black Sea Fleet, crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific. He imagined that a captain was master on board his ship and that discipline could do anything. Neither he nor his generals nor his ministers condescended to notice details: the clenching of the horny hands of a conscripted peasant, or the fact that it was noticed by a sentry, who stored it away in his mind for future use.

Nevertheless, such scarcely perceptible things were much more important than the solemn promises of the five Powers, or the delivery of munitions, or the opening of credits. The truth—that truth of which none of the leaders had dared to catch a glimpse—was that the army was falling to pieces: not because it was short of guns or rifles, not because the circumstances were unfavourable or the enemy were too strong, but simply and solely because an army does not consist solely of officers, and because nine out of ten among the rank and file, owing to their relationships, their occupations, their rank in life, had no reason for wanting to win.

The enemy in front of them were no better clad, no better fed, no better armed, no better disciplined. But on that side everybody was fighting for himself, for his family, for his neighbours: for millions upon millions of neighbours, not only Russian, but also Japanese and American. On that side, everybody knew that a war becomes a civil war when you kill a man, not because he wears a cap flattened at the side whereas you wear a round cap, but because there is an irreducible difference between your horny hands and his soft palms, between your muscular structure and his muscular structure, between your state of mind and his state of mind.

On June 1 Clemenceau sent Kolchak definite orders, and on the 8th the White army retreated from Ufa. On the 24th a conference of the Powers decided to go on supporting the admiral, and three weeks later Kolchak evacuated Ekaterinburg. On July 16, he reached an

agreement with Hoover, and on the 26th his troops left Cheliabinsk

In the course of August the Supreme Regent had a spurt of energy. He conscripted in all directions. His ministers themselves were called to the colours, though they got the advantage of a reprieve. On the 27th these soldier-ministers issued a proclamation which prescribed "Everything for the war!"

Everything for the war! Flowers and speeches, newspaper articles and cigarettes. Everything for the war!—and once again the United States renewed their confidence in the admiral. Everything for the war!—and once again trains set off for the Urals.

But the soldiers had had enough of words, and they were short of tobacco. The Allies confined themselves to promises. They were on the point of sacking their servant, who had made a mess of things. More and more often the trains never reached their destinations. They were caught in the flood which was starting to sweep irresistibly towards the East.

On November 10th Kolchak's Government left Omsk. On the 13th the Czechs delivered to the Allies a demand for repatriation. The next day Omsk fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks.

In vain did Kolchak's Government, now transferred to Irkutsk, issue an appeal for the support of the masses in general. In vain did it recall the commander-in-chief of the army. In vain did it change its prime minister.

A string of trains was slowly trickling eastwards along the Trans-Siberian railway. On either side of the line, men, women, and children, who had failed to find room on top of the coaches or on the buffers, made their way in the same direction in carts or on foot.

Within a few weeks Kolchak's army ceased to exist. Only a few groups of officers, who had come together under the command of General Kappel, sometime a Social-

Revolutionary and lately a lieutenant, managed to cut their way to Irkutsk

The track was blocked by the Czechs' trains, made up of wagons decorated with branches of fir-trees and portraits of their 'Little Father' Masaryk, and carrying trophies and souvenirs work-benches dismantled in factories in the Urals, pianos found in country-houses, pictures, motor-boats, jewellery

Astray somewhere in the midst of the Czechs' trains crawled the special train of the Supreme Regent, who had stayed in Omsk after his officials had left With him Kolchak had his personal guard, his new prime minister, and the Russian gold reserve

It was winter, and the track was all snow Corpses hung from telegraph posts, and birds crowded the wires The Whites' authority stopped at the verge of the forests on either side of the ballast Their territory covered an area two thousand five hundred miles long, but only a few hundred yards wide Nothing was left of the flagship but a raft

At Nijni-Udinsk the representatives of the Allies guaranteed Kolchak free passage eastwards on condition that he agreed to leave his escort behind Henceforth he travelled almost alone The tricolour, the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack floated over this coach, side by side with the Japanese and Italian flags

Irregulars were coming out of their lairs Communist organizations had mobilized their members The workers were taking up arms In the presence of this uprising, generals became converts to democracy, the Czechs proclaimed their neutrality, and the Socialists themselves decided to act

From a few hundred miles westwards, the Fifth Red army started flowing along the Trans-Siberian railway As it passed, the waves of the Soviet Republic closed over the thin strip of White territory.

On December 21 the workers revolted at Cheremkhovo, the point of intersection of the railway and the coal basin. On the 24th the soldiers and railwaymen at Irkutsk rose in their turn. The small shopkeeping class sought to turn the situation to account. They had formed a Political Centre, which repudiated Kolchak and dreamed about independence.

On January 14 the Supreme Regent's train reached Irkutsk. There General Janin and the Czech command, foreseeing the tunnels of the Transbaikalian line being blown up by irregulars, handed over Admiral Kolchak, with his gold and his flags, to representatives of the Political Centre, in return for authority to continue their flight eastwards. It was the beginning of 1920.

PART TWO
THE HERO FOUND AND LOST

A LOCOMOTIVE without wagons came into Dauria station. At the last moment the engineer shut off steam, and the locomotive spat water, fire, and smoke.

Lieutenant Zabiakin was back from Chita. On the station steps he bumped into Lieutenant Chernov.

'So you're back, are you?' said Chernov. 'Did you see Semionov?'

'Yes, we spent some time together,' Zabiakin smiled, smugly.

Chernov studied his comrade. Then, with a trace of envy, he asked:

'Had a good time in Chita, eh?'

'A good time? I had a good time, take my word for it,' Zabiakin was still smiling. 'I went to the theatre, and then to the Siberian Club until four o'clock in the morning. What a night! I seem to remember putting a bit of a hole in a civvie who looked at me in a way I didn't fancy. Take my word for it.'

'Finished him off, eh?'

'I shouldn't be surprised.'

Zabiakin couldn't stop smiling. His drawn-back lips disclosed teeth stained with nicotine. His high spirits communicated themselves to Chernov.

'So everything was fine?'

'It was.'

'And everything else too?'

'Everything else too.'

'In short, everything's fine?'

'Everything's fine.'

They had got to the point of exchanging winks, nudges, slaps on the back. All at once, Zabiakin yawned, desperately

'Sleepy?'

'Never closed my eyes.'

Zabiakin yawned again. Then, with renewed animation, he went on

'The ataman bought that Machka of his seven chemises, and they cost eleven thousand roubles.'

'He must be like me,' said Chernov, pensively, 'fond of fine linen.'

He stroked his beard, which was black and carefully trimmed, and added, doubtfully

'But did you really see any of those chemises? What are they like?'

'Machka was wearing one at the theatre. She let us have a look at it.'

Chernov suddenly felt depressed. 'I must get myself sent to Chita,' he said to himself. 'This fellow Zabiakin always gets away with things. Well, it's up to me to see that he doesn't go again in a hurry.'

'The Baron's expecting you,' he said.

'Oh, that's nice! Just when I want to go to bed.'

Chernov lowered his voice.

'I've rarely seen him in such a good temper,' he went on. 'You needn't worry.'

Slowly Zabiakin left the station. As he approached Ungern's quarters, he drew himself erect, his feet started keeping time, his arms assumed the regulation position. Outside the Baron's door he made sure he was all in order, and then knocked three times.

He had not slept for twenty-four hours. He would have given anything—even the half-pound of opium he had taken from a Chinese and hidden in his saddle-bag—to be able to lie down and go over his memories of the past night.

But in front of him, towering over him from his full height, stood General Ungern Zabiakin was a regular officer. With his heels together, and one hand stuck to the peak of his cap, he stared straight in front of him, weary-eyed to be sure, but with all the lack of expression of the professional soldier.

'His Excellency General Semionov begs to be remembered to you, most

With a wave of his hand, Ungern cut him short.

'That will keep,' he said. 'Did you see Captain Sudzuki?'

'Yes, Your Excellency. The captain instructed me to tell you that he received your letter and forwarded it to Tokio. He has had the arms and munitions deposited at the places arranged. He will send you further details in writing. For his own part, Captain Sudzuki is entirely in agreement with you.'

Zabiakin had to make an effort not to yawn again. Desperately, he kept his eyes fixed on Ungern's face. Chernov had said the Baron was in good temper.

Ungern grew taller, till he touched the ceiling. His features wavered and were blurred by a haze. In the place where his head ought to be sprang up two heads, overlapping each other. Four grey, cold, intent eyes stared at Lieutenant Zabiakin.

Zabiakin shook his head and came to himself.

'Lieutenant!' said Ungern.

'Yes, Your Excellency. As I begged to inform you, Captain Sudzuki

'Lieutenant!' repeated Ungern, raising his voice. His face paled a little.

Zabiakin, for his part, went red in the face. Chernov had played him a dirty trick. With his hands glued to the seams of his trousers, he waited.

'You have gone red in the face, Lieutenant,' said Ungern. 'It is a colour that ill becomes a White officer.'

Ungern barked a brief laugh With a sinking heart, Zabiakin ventured a wan smile Promptly the Baron exploded

'What were you doing in Chita, you son-of-a-bitch? Drinking and making love and gambling, weren't you? Silence! Silence when I'm speaking to you'

Zabiakin had not said a word He shrank into himself He hung his head It was obvious that, under his cap, he was bald He was nothing but an elderly man, tired and resigned

'How can I wage war with men like you?' thundered Ungern 'This is a war in which everybody ought to keep himself strong and pure and clean He ought to think only about one thing winning or dying D'you hear me, you? I say you ought to think only about one thing But you must have your wine and your women above all, your women Sheer hoggishness Say something, can't you?'

Long years of discipline nailed Zabiakin to the spot Automatically he stood at attention again He looked up He was on the point of speaking But his eyes met Ungern's

With his arms hanging lax, his back bent, his face sagging into folds, he stared at the toes of his boots

'I'm sleepy, Your Excellency,' he murmured, in an indifferent tone of voice

Ungern calmed down again

'Sleepy, are you?' he repeated, thoughtfully, as though he were in course of solving a mathematical problem 'Sleepy, eh?' he repeated 'All right, go and have your sleep But, before that Chernov!' he shouted suddenly 'See that the lieutenant gets fifty lashes with the whip'

'Yes, Your Excellency,' responded an eager voice from the next room 'Certainly, Your Excellency' A click of spurs mingled with Chernov's words as he stood at attention

UNGERN HAD let his beard grow What was the good of shaving every day? 'You ought to smarten yourself up' He had once heard somebody say that somewhere Oh, yes, it was his grandmother, and she had looked at him with an air of reproach But at that time there was no question of his growing a beard Be more tidy That was at Reval Probably it was just the same, though now it was a capital capital of the Republic of Esthonia Home, sweet home! Stuff and nonsense! Blond, pig-headed peasants who could just about say '*Erole*' and swear in Russian and Esthonian All alike, cringing serfs who would shoot you in the back if they got the chance

Never would he have taken that American journalist for a Balt He wasn't any too comfortable, poor chap, that time he came to Dauria 'I didn't recognize Your Excellency' Doubtless that was because of his beard Be tidy Be smart Who else was it who had said something to him about that? Oh, yes, it was Baron Wrangel, in command of his regiment on the Austrian front A funny regiment, with a colonel like Wrangel, and officers like Semionov and Ungern. What was it the colonel had said?

'Lieutenant, I recognize your gallantry, but remember that an officer should set his men an example not only in courage, but also in discipline and smartness'

If Baron Wrangel liked discipline, he had only to come to Dauria No arguments, no books, and, above all, no women Those bits of pink and white flesh, as sticky as jam Incapable of remembering the multiplication-

table, with nothing in their heads but going to bed with somebody In time of war, every woman was an enemy

And there had always been war against the Japanese, against the Chinese, against the Germans, against the Austrians, against the Turks Now there was war against the Russians here in Dauria, the last place on earth in the wilds of Transbaikalia, created out of nothingness, with its station, its barracks, and its bungalows, by contact between Asiatic soil and the steel railway

A shoddy war, a guerilla war After fighting against the best-trained armies in the world, here he was laying traps for peasants armed with shot-guns, for railway travellers, for civilians A civil war In the very cradle of war

'It is the country which we call the land of Gog and Magog, and which they call the land of Ung and Mugul ' Marco Polo had known this country Doubtless he had passed this way Perhaps he had set up his tent at Dauria amid the desert dunes It was perhaps at this very spot that, centuries before the birth of the railway, Genghis Khan had inspected impatient horses and men all blood-stained with the dawn, simply raised his hand, and so spurred the still-benighted West to build bulbous churches and domed cathedrals It was here, perhaps, that he had simply raised his hand, and forty years later he had reached Moscow, Budapest, the creeks of the Adriatic

The Baron did not feel sleepy He went out into the street. Dauria was asleep A drowsy sentry presented arms The man's face was invisible in the darkness The Baron made his way to the station The platform was deserted. One wretched lamp lit up a stretch of wall, from which hung a torn strip of paper

Ungern went on to the barracks Another sentry presented arms Men sprawled half-undressed, with their faces distorted by sleep The place stank of stale smoke, dirty linen, and urine Outside it was as dark as ever A

black sack swung from a telegraph-post a man hanged
Dauria still slept

The Baron returned to the station The whistle of a locomotive sounded to the west The rails started murmuring very softly A train was feeling its way along in the dark

Colonel Laurenz made his appearance on the platform at the head of a detachment The men took up position alongside the track, with fixed bayonets

'Colonel,' said Ungern, 'don't forget to search the locomotive'

'Yes, Your Excellency'

'I've no confidence in those engineers'

'No, Your Excellency'

'Search the tender too Look underneath the coaches Get a man to climb up on top of them'

'Yes, Your Excellency'

Even in the middle of the night, Laurenz looked as though he had just got out of his bath, clean-shaven, spruce and wide-awake

By now the rails carried the sound of a grave, urgent, mysterious voice Ungern went back to his quarters, dropped on his camp-bed without undressing, and fell asleep Instantly his dreams took him a thousand years back

‘COME IN, Colonel!’

Laurenz opened Ungern’s door, stood at attention on the threshold, and saluted

‘Well, Colonel, what’s the news?’ Ungern sounded almost amiable ‘Have you got the dispatches there? Give them to me No, you needn’t Just tell me briefly what they’re all about’

He’s in a good temper, observed Laurenz almost playful The colonel, as he unfolded the dispatches, groped for the reason He recalled Lieutenant Zabiakin being carried away flat on his face on a stretcher Would that be it? The explanation struck him as plausible, but scarcely certain Too much time had elapsed since Zabiakin’s whipping He was all right again by now

‘A message from Chita,’ Laurenz began ‘The irregulars have derailed a train ten miles from Oloviannaya The Japanese command has ordered a punitive expedition’

For the last moment or two Ungern had been smiling In a slightly disturbed tone of voice the colonel went on

‘Sato is expected here to-morrow There is reason to believe that he managed to reach Urga and had a conversation with the Hutukhtu At least, that is to be gathered from a cipher telegram from the Japanese observer, dated yesterday evening’

Laurenz glanced at the general again One thing was clear Ungern was not listening to him He was still smiling and staring at a point just behind the colonel’s head. Laurenz passed his hand over his hair, and made

sure of the fastening of his holster, containing a revolver which was the envy of all his brother-officers. Of course, he was all in order.

'Are you up in astronomy, Colonel?' asked Ungern.

'I beg your pardon?' Laurenz felt rather uncomfortable.

'Never picked up any astronomy, have you?' Ungern persisted.

'No, I haven't.'

Ungern was visibly disappointed. He stroked his moustache.

'That's a pity,' said he. 'Otherwise I could have explained the principles of Mongolian astronomy to you. It's very instructive. Do you know that the lamas are familiar with twenty-eight constellations, but they can't point out a single one in the sky? And why not? Because all the constellations they know are to be found in the southern hemisphere. The lamas inherited their sky-charts from Hindu Buddhists. They live and die under the Great Bear and the Pole Star, but all they know about is the Southern Cross. Such has been the case for centuries. What do you say to that, Colonel?'

Laurenz made up his mind firmly to say nothing at all to it. He let a moment or two elapse. Then he reported.

'We arrested two Jewish Communists in the train last night. I think they were carrying instructions to the irregulars in Transbaikalia. Iakimov's men. What shall we do with them?'

'Do you think that an astronomer could ever become a Bolshevik?' asked Ungern. 'Take my word for it, he couldn't.' He paused for a few seconds and then added 'Do what you like with them.'

Laurenz was in a hurry to be finished with the interview.

'I may go, Your Excellency?'

И

Ungern made no reply The colonel withdrew on tip-toe

Outside he bumped into Captain Makeev, who was standing suspiciously close to the door

'He's impossible to-day,' said Laurenz 'He doesn't even listen to what one says I was talking serious business to him, and do you know what he replied? I'll give you a thousand guesses'

The captain chewed his loose lower lip, but said nothing

'He asked me,' went on the colonel, working himself up, 'whether an astronomer could become a Bolshevik I don't know what's the matter with him, but really to-day'

'I'd give a lot to have that revolver of yours,' interrupted Makeev, winking violently

Laurenz turned round Standing on the threshold of his room, Ungern was staring at his two officers

'Colonel,' he said, in a colourless tone of voice, 'telegraph to Captain Sudzuki at Japanese headquarters and ask whether we should send a force against the irregulars Oloviannaya way As soon as Sato arrives, send him in to me Keep the two prisoners under guard I'll see them later'

Ungern shut his door again

HE HAD seen the soldiers climb into the tender and thrust their bayonets into the wood-pile That was all

For the tenth time, Abram went over the details of the scene in his mind Had he been imprudent? Could it be called imprudent to have neither a fair complexion nor a snub nose? Or had Semion been thoughtless to bring his glasses, his frizzy hair, and his sunken, bluish temples along with him? Anyway, the officer had made no mistake

‘Glad to see you, Jew-boys,’ he said

At once a wide, empty space had been left round them

‘I can tell Jew-boys a hundred yards off,’ the officer went on He dilated his nostrils with voluptuous disgust, and added ‘By their smell’

The soldiers, with their hob-nailed boots clumping on the platform, tramped into the empty space round the ‘Jew-boys’

Yes, he should have said something But all his strength was taken up with suppressing the little nervous shudder which shook him from head to foot Still, he should have said something

Semion had stared at the crowd with a short-sighted man’s smile He had even taken a step forward, as though to get a better view of something that interested him very much

No, talking wouldn’t have done any good Then what about hiding in the coach? The soldiers had searched inside the coaches, underneath the coaches, on top of the coaches A man wasn’t so easy to hide as a letter

Suppose they had got out at the last stop before Dauria? Suppose they had marched through the forest, first south and then east? But how could they have marched for days and days, perhaps weeks and weeks, without food, without maps, without a compass, through a region swarming with Whites and Japanese?

The Communist Party must have been very short of men to send Semion and himself to Transbaikalia, when they knew nothing about the country and could not speak Buriat. But how could it help being short of men? There was the Don, there was the Ukraine, there was the Crimea, there was the North, there was the Caucasus, there was Turkestan. And then there was headquarters, Moscow itself. Men were wanted everywhere, and always to fill gaps in the front line.

When he heard that the comrades sent earlier had fallen into the Whites' hands, the party district secretary had summoned Abram. He had said:

'Abram, I'm sending you and any comrade you like to choose to Transbaikalia to-night. Above all, see you don't get pinched. We haven't got too many militants to spare.'

The secretary was on the point of laughing—he had a nice laugh, and it came easily to him—but already other people were thronging round his desk.

On his way out, Abram bumped into a young fellow who was holding up his glasses with one hand and sticking his nose up against the notices outside the secretary's office. They struck up an acquaintance.

'Do you know anything about Transbaikalia?' asked Abram.

'No,' replied Semion, with an apologetic smile, 'I'm a student in the Science School.'

'Then I don't see much use in going to a university,' said Abram. His own schooling, all in all, consisted of two years of *cheder* in his village in White Russia, where Rabbi Kaplujanski taught him to read Hebrew. Neither in

the Bible nor in the Talmud had there been anything about Transbaikalia. Since then Abram had studied geography in a different way, and elsewhere.

He considered Semion again. Then he assumed command of the expedition.

'Meet me at the station at six o'clock this evening,' he said.

No militants to spare. . . . Doubtless they should have travelled in different trains. That would have been more prudent. But at Omsk they had been told that the one which Abram proposed to take was the last. There was nothing for it but for both of them to take it.

Kolchak, for all practical purposes, had ceased to exist; but Semionov, thanks to the Japanese, was holding out in Transbaikalia. So were the Red irregulars, too, and it was urgent to get in touch with them as soon as possible.

Tomsk; Novo-Nikolaievsk; Irkutsk; Lake Baikal—these had been landmarks amid the little incidents of their weeks of travelling. Now their days of hunger and thirst, their fear of their travelling companions, the torture of passport inspections—all these seemed shrunken, shrivelled a hundred times shorter than the moment of their arrival at Dauria.

The coach had struck them as dark as night. But now, by comparison with their cell, it seemed brilliantly lit. You could see shadows moving about; and, though the slits between the planks were as dark as the walls themselves, if you concentrated all your attention you could make out faces and hands as vague blurs.

The prison at Dauria was much darker than that. One day Semion had talked about interplanetary space, and told Abram that in it light itself was invisible. Abram had imagined it just like this. Over and over again he raised his hands to his eyes; but the darkness remained motionless. He could not see his hands.

But now, by dint of staring into the dark, he must

be having hallucinations. Otherwise how could he explain that grey, rectangular blur which floated before his eyes? Abram rubbed them and looked again. The blur was still there—a barely visible rectangle cut out in the dark.

Abram called Semion's attention to it. There was no reply, and he left Semion alone. He could hear his comrade's even breathing. 'I'm all alone in my vigil,' he said to himself.

At this moment he caught sight of two pale blurs in front of him. They were his hands. He could not make out their exact outline yet—nothing but the white of his palms, like two nebulas nibbled by the dark. Abram raised his head. The rectangle had become lighter and more distinct.

Dawn was breaking rapidly. In the direction where he had caught sight of the grey rectangle, Abram saw a wall, from which a single brick had been removed to let light through. In this opening a strip of sky turned bluer, cut in two by the trunk of a pine, whose reddish bark was soaked with sunlight.

Semion was sleeping curled up in a corner. The cell was nine feet by six. Its walls were all over scribbles. Abraham made out a few names: Utintsev, Mossin, Skvortsov. Higher up he read 'Long live the Soviets!' 'Hello, comrades!' 'Tell . . .'. That sentence was unfinished. In a corner he discovered the signature of Chura Ivanov. But hadn't he heard that Chura was burned in the boiler of a locomotive at Harbin? Unless this were another Ivanov. Abram felt less lonely.

Semion went on sleeping. It was not until he heard footsteps that Abram awakened his comrade.

AN OFFICER came into the cell. He had a beard, a sandy moustache, a high forehead, eyebrows which met in the middle, and eyes which, under their thin, shrivelled lids, showed traces of insomnia. The cross of Saint George was pinned to his tunic.

The cell was so small that you had to keep your hands still when you talked. Close as he was to the officer, Abram could make out little details: the shabbiness of his epaulets, the red veins which riddled the white of his eyes.

‘Have you had a good sleep?’ asked the officer.

Then Abram noticed that he carried a short, slim whip.

‘You needn’t be afraid,’ the officer went on. ‘As you see, I’m alone, and I’m not even armed. But, to be sure, you fellows have fear in your blood.’

Abram felt like bursting into a contemptuous laugh, but he knew that a Communist must know how to control himself. He glanced at Semion. In the course of their arrest, Semion had lost his glasses. Instead of the officer’s face, all he could see was a reddish blur. Semion fixed his eyes on this blur, and asked:

‘I suppose you’ve come to question us?’

‘Later on,’ replied the officer. ‘There’s no hurry. I just want to know where you’ve come from.’

‘From Tomsk,’ Abram hastened to say. ‘We ran away, like everybody else.’

The officer’s face registered disgust. Abram’s voice betrayed the intonation of his little White Russian village, of Rabbi Kaplujanski, of generations of commentators on the Talmud, lousy and short-tempered.

'A Siberian of old stock, I should think,' remarked the officer 'And an Old Believer, no doubt?'

'I'm a Jew,' Abram burst out

'Are you really?' exclaimed the officer 'Just imagine that! And I'm a soldier'

He talked in a politely conversational tone of voice. The three men made slow, unfinished gestures, as though they were in a drawing-room with their hands occupied with tea-cups and plates of cake. But the drawing-room was only nine feet by six, and its walls displayed signatures which were all testaments.

With the end of his whip, affecting the greatest disgust, the officer lifted one of the flaps of Abram's overcoat.

'Let me see what a Jew looks like,' he said.

Semion could make out only light and dark blurs. Nevertheless, he put in quickly

'Leave this to me, Abram!'

Then, addressing himself to the officer, he went on

'If you want to question us, do it. If not, there's no good wasting time.'

Abram looked at his comrade with a dogged expression which went oddly with his youthful face. The fact was that he admired Semion for his calm, his self-control. So long as it had been a matter of getting something to eat or finding seats in the trains, Abram had taken the lead. But now he felt that it had passed to Semion.

Abram, for his part, was afraid. He was afraid of these walls covered with scribbles, he was afraid of this officer who twiddled his whip in his fingers as he jested, and he despised himself sincerely. I'm no true Communist, he said to himself. He stared at Semion. Semion wasn't afraid. That's because he's short-sighted, decided Abram, and he felt a little comforted.

'Question you?' repeated the officer. 'Well, what's your profession?'

'I'm a student,' replied Semion.

‘At the Commercial Institute? Or in pharmacy?’

‘In the Science School. I’m studying mathematics.

‘You’re lying.’

‘No, I’m not,’ said Semion, quietly.

‘Mathematics, you say?’

The officer’s eyes, streaked red with insomnia, turned transparent.

‘Yes, I said mathematics,’ Semion bumped against the wall as he moved his arm.

‘Then tell me about the differential calculus,’ ordered the officer.

Semion smiled.

‘I was expecting an interrogation,’ he said, ‘not an examination.’

During the past three years he had talked about many things: the international situation; the Party’s agrarian programme; the position of the trades unions. But all he retained of his mathematics was precision of vocabulary and logical sequence of sentences.

‘All right,’ said the officer, ‘I’ll take your word for it. You’re a student of mathematics.’

Semion caught a glimpse of the amphitheatre in the school and the professor, whose absent-mindedness had been a legend with generations of students. The professor was still alive. The last time he had been in Petrograd, Semion had seen him at the Scholars’ Club. He was on his way to line up outside a co-operative store.

‘Tell me,’ said the officer, ‘how have you, a mathematician, been able to become a Communist? Is it because you’re a Jew?’

Ah, said Semion to himself, here we are! That’s what he was trying to get at.

‘But I’m not a Communist,’ he replied, in an indifferent tone of voice. ‘My comrade has already told you that we fled from Tomsk . . .’

The officer cut him short.

'I know, I know! I know you're lying, and I know you'll go on lying I know you're a Communist A Jew who wasn't a Communist would never dare to risk himself in Dauria Don't you know that General Ungern has all Jews put to death? Haven't you heard that?'

Semion said nothing

'I am Ungern,' the officer went on 'I promise to spare your life if you answer my question'

So this vague figure, with a reddish blue for a face, was Ungern, the Czar of Dauria, the Bloody Baron In the train, whenever anybody mentioned his name everybody fell silent

'I'm sorry,' said Semion, wearily, 'but I'm not a Communist, and I can't tell you anything'

The reddish blue came nearer him

'I am Ungern You ought to know that I never lie You ought to know that nobody has ever left this cell alive, and that nobody in it died easily, from a bullet Well, I give you my word of honour—I, Ungern—that if you don't tell me the truth, you won't leave this cell alive, and I'll see you don't die too quickly Do you know how the Mongols punish criminals? They tie their hands together, with a rag steeped in horse-dung in between the palms The dung ferments and becomes full of worms, and the hands rot and fall off in bits'

Ungern paused, and added

'But that doesn't kill you'

Since he had lost his glasses, Semion could see his hands only if he raised them to his eyes He resisted the temptation to do so He repeated, wearily

'We fled from Tomsk before the arrival of the Reds'

'All lies!' interrupted Ungern 'You're lying, you swine! The Reds were flung back from Tomsk They are in retreat towards the Urals We have retaken Omsk We are winning'

'We decided to take refuge in Vladivostok and then go abroad,' Semion persisted 'The game's up'

'Who invented the sign of the integral?' shouted Ungern

'Leibnitz,' Semion shouted back at him

'And who introduced limits?'

'Fourier'

All at once Semion felt the warmth of Abram's shoulder against his shoulder Through these strange names which he had never heard before, Abram had caught a familiar intonation The two of them, the elder with his blinking eyes and his bluish temples, the younger with his fleshy, greasy nose, stood there side by side, silent, still

Ungern studied them closely Abram noticed his ears They were big and flattened at the bottom, like an old man's A sign of long life, Abram reflected.

'A scholar,' said Ungern, 'an astronomer, a physicist, a mathematician, ought to be a conservative He knows that the universe is governed by immutable laws, laid down once and for all, and valid always and everywhere Orthodox mechanics teaches us that tokens of time and space have an absolute value Similarly man'

What man? wondered Abram, who was a downright, practical person Does he mean man in general?

He's trying to provoke me, thought Semion, and he kept silent

'A scholar,' pursued Ungern, 'has a sense of order, a sense of hierarchy, a sense of absolute categories'

A short time before he left Moscow, Semion had read a popular work by a foreign scientist, a German *The Theory of Relativity* Being only a second-year student and busy as secretary of his party unit, he had followed the author's argument with some difficulty On the other hand, he remembered certain sentences, whose metaphorical meaning struck him as self-evident

'Physics,' he said, with a dogged air, 'always tacitly admitted that time tokens had an absolute significance. But that was before the theory of relativity.'

Ungern interrupted him.

'The theory of relativity?' he repeated interrogatively.

For the last few moments Abram could not make head or tail of the conversation. Still, he reflected with satisfaction, that damned fellow Semion has scored off Ungern. Semion went on talking, slowly. He quoted the names of foreign comrades unknown to Abram: Lorentz, Riemann, Minkowski. I hope he doesn't forget anything, said Abram to himself, I hope he doesn't make any mistake. Now, you swine, you're going to see whether a Communist can be a mathematician.

'So,' said Semion, warming to his work, 'we have one system of co-ordinates C , and another system of co-ordinates C^1 .'

Abram watched the expression on Ungern's face anxiously. System of co-ordinates? What on earth did that mean? But Ungern seemed to know what it was all about.

'I may quote you the classic example of the train,' said Semion. 'A man throws a stone out of a coach-window.'

The classic example of the train. The wagon jolted along. Floating on the surface of a cup filled with oil, a lit wick kept time with the jolts. The tiny blob of light illuminated a bit of wall, boots, a nose, a sleeve, a fur cap. Now and again the flame leapt up, drawing out of the dark a notice: 'Men 40, horses 8', and a medley of bodies and sacks on the floor.

'The man drops the stone out of the window without imparting any motion to it. Then what happens?'

The train braked to a sudden stop. Into the silence rose snores, wheezes, a fit of coughing. A voice made itself heard, as though it was pursuing an interrupted conversa-

tion 'They're getting in the hay at home now' Silence fell again The coach creaked and got under way again A breath of fresh air penetrated into it The light lengthened, paled and went out A man's voice said 'Scoundrels! Won't be any more travelling soon The irregulars are derailing trains'

'The man in the train sees the stone fall in a straight line'

The train groaned as it crawled through the Siberian night The darkness outside was peopled with soldiers, irregulars, birds of prey There was silence in the coach A sleepy voice remarked 'And then, when the hay is harvested' It dwindled to an indistinct whisper. There was silence in the coach again Twenty coaches stuffed with sleepy humanity, lurched through the night

'But now let us imagine a man standing on the embankment at the moment when the stone falls He sees it describe the curve of a parabola'

Threads of light crept over the bodies of the sleeping travellers The train seemed to be running more rapidly Through the opening in the door sickly shrubs filed lazily past The earth was there, quite close, familiar, and ordinary Telegraph wires rose alongside the train, higher and still higher, bumped into a post, dropped suddenly, and started rising again

'Well, faced with those two testimonies, we ask ourselves did the stone describe a straight line or parabola?'

A whistle sounded in the night 'We're coming to Dauria,' said somebody 'Well, we'll see the Baron at last,' said another voice, trying to sound jocular 'Let's sincerely hope we don't,' somebody else replied from the other end of the wagon The train slowed down It seemed to be hesitating which way to go Every other minute the locomotive let off a brief whistle You could hear every escape of steam. The train became silent and stopped.

'To that question there is only one reply The stone describes a straight line in relation to the train, and a parabola in relation to the embankment'

A hand opened the door, and a lantern appeared in the opening 'Get out,' said somebody One by one the travellers approached the threshold, hesitated, and then, as though they were lured by the void, jumped down on to the platform It was a long platform, running alongside a low building, and it was damp, though it had not rained all day

It was already autumn, but a particular kind of autumn, made up of mildew, insomnia, and solitude, an autumn which had nothing in common with those fruitful, peaceful months called September and October, an autumn such as was only to be found at three o'clock in the morning, in a station lost in the wilds, under the sickly light of lamps whose flames flickered in the gusts of wind Soldiers with fixed bayonets stood motionless on the platform

Ungern was still silent Abram saw that his eyes, under their thin, shrivelled lids, had gone almost white, with just two black dots in them Then his lips started quivering His jaws contracted as though he felt suffocated Abram wanted to warn his comrade, but Semion's short-sightedness isolated him with his systems of co-ordinates

'Bolshevik!' shouted Ungern. 'Did you learn all that at Tomsk? Who taught you that? Who taught you that fine theory of yours?'

'Einstein,' said Semion, gently 'A German scientist His name is Einstein And I'm not a Bolshevik'

'Einstein? A Jew, eh? What's your own name? Where are your papers? Who sent you?'

The cell rang with the Baron's shouts A reddish blur danced before Semion's eyes He felt quite indifferent He had said good-bye to mathematics Never, never

again It wasn't worth while arguing Just keep silent, except for repeating the same words

'We fled from Tomsk . . . I'm not a Communist . . . '

Ungern was stifled in this cell nine feet by six Laurenz was quite right these men were indeed Jews and Communists Probably two commissars At all costs he must get a confession, an explanation of their presence, out of them There was treachery everywhere, even in the noblest of sciences Fixed categories, absolute ideas everything was sliding down the slope Sooner the certainty of the lamas' sky-charts But he must make this stiff-necked, sealed-up Semite speak

'Guards!' shouted the Baron 'Guards!'

There was a tramp of boots in the passage

Since he had lost his glasses, Semion could hear like a blind man He was seized by his arms, dragged out of the cell, and rammed up against a wall

The silence was broken only by the heavy breathing of several men Then there was the sound of a body falling Silence again. Then came the sound of a blow, short, sharp, heavy, a cry, a hail of blows, as though somebody were beating a carpet, and an inarticulate, swelling shriek

'Abram!' shouted Semion

There was a sudden whisper at his ear He recognized the Baron's voice

'Look!' said Ungern 'Have a good look! Don't try to turn away!'

A hand seized him by the hair, forced him to bend his head down, and held it there

At his feet at first he could make out only vague figures moving

In the dark passage Abram was stretched on the floor. One soldier was sitting on his head, and another on his feet A third soldier, armed with a bamboo, was slashing at his buttocks and thighs They had torn off his overcoat and his trousers Dark streaks showed on his body,

the skin burst, blood oozed out of the wounds and ran in zigzags, sticking to hairs and collecting in hollows. The tissues broke, and mangled, dead flesh came away in bits and pieces, stripping the cartilages, on which bloody tatters quivered.

'Look,' whispered the Baron, 'look, Einstein! Now are you a Communist? You are, aren't you?'

'No,' said Semion. 'I am not a Communist.'

Head down, the Baron plunged towards the door of the prison. He walked away with long strides, drinking in the fresh air greedily. His scar, the mark of a sabre-cut, was hurting him. He scarcely saw the figures which hurried out of his way. He slashed at bushes and telegraph-posts with his whip.

What were they made of, these men whom nothing would force to speak, neither suffering, nor friendship? There was nothing to be got out of them but their blood.

Ungern felt leaden, he felt thirsty, he felt stifled. He came to a standstill, and raised his hand to his forehead. A sudden, sharp pain struck him in the temple, like a stone thrown through the window of a train in motion.

‘WHAT’S HAPPENING?’

Lieutenant Zabiakin went his way without replying, and disappeared inside the station

Makeev was piqued because his question remained unanswered. He looked round, and caught sight of a Buriat soldier squatting in the middle of the track and staring at the rails affectionately

‘What are you doing there, you swine?’ shouted Makeev. ‘Get back to your post, and be quick about it!’

On the platform three soldiers were practising with a machine-gun. On the other side of the station a horse could be heard pawing the ground

Captain Makeev made his way to the telegraph office. The room was plunged in the gloom common to stations. The operator was at his post. A thin thread of paper ran out of the machine. The table was strewn with strips of white tape on which letters stood out in black. Makeev picked one up at random

‘... Committee decided shoot (1) former Supreme Regent Admiral Kolchak (2) former Premier Pepeliaiev. Stop. Better execution two criminals long since deserving death than hundreds innocent victims. Stop. President Military Revolutionary Committee Chir...’ The end was missing. Makeev threw the strip back on to the heap

The telegraphist stared at him vacantly. Where was he at the moment? In Chita? In Vladivostok? Makeev opened his mouth and raised his eyebrows by way of interrogation. Then it dawned on him that the operator

had not even noticed him. He picked up another telegram from the table.

'Government northern region has evacuated Archangel Stop Troops still loyal falling back on Murmansk Stop Fresh Communist rising in Murmansk.'

Makeev closed his eyes, and groped for another telegram in the heap.

'Chita Ataman Semionov informs General Ungern.'

'Captain,' murmured the telegraphist in a low voice, as though he did not want to be heard outside, 'I can't leave the instrument. Would you be good enough to fetch Colonel Laurenz at once?'

Makeev made his way towards the colonel's quarters. Soldiers passed at the run. On the platform outside Laurenz's quarters a sentry presented arms.

'Is the colonel in?' asked Makeev.

'No, Sir. The colonel is with His Excellency.'

Makeev crossed the street. Behind Ungern's quarters a camel gave tongue. Ungern and Laurenz came out of the barracks. Makeev hastened up to them.

'Colonel, you're wanted in the telegraph office.'

'I'll go myself,' said Ungern. 'Give the necessary orders, Colonel.'

He hurried away.

'What's happening?' asked Makeev again.

'I haven't time to tell you just now,' replied Laurenz, and he, too, went off with his springy step. Makeev was left alone.

A wail descended from the sky. A flight of storks were passing over Dauria. So they, too, are on the wing already, reflected Makeev. He followed the black triangle with his eyes as it disappeared southwards towards the Mongolian frontier. Then another sound ascended into the sky, a regular, powerful, purposeful sound. An aeroplane described a semicircle over the station and set off in pursuit of the birds. The sky was empty again.

Zabiakin came towards Makeev. He stopped, and struck three matches before he could get his pipe to draw.

'Look here,' said Makeev, laying his hand on Zabiakin's shoulder. He had made up his mind not to let Zabiakin go without getting some information out of him.

'Look here, what exactly is happening?'

'Well, my dear fellow, if you think I know,' Zabiakin pulled hard at his pipe. 'Between ourselves, I've an idea that things aren't going very well with Semionov.'

'Do you really mean that?'

'I do.' Zabiakin looked up and down the street. There was nobody within earshot. 'The irregulars are marching on Chita,' he went on, quickly. 'The garrison aren't to be trusted. And the winter's coming on.'

'And what about the Japanese?'

'I tell you the winter's coming on. The Japanese don't like the cold. It's all right for us.'

'You're not telling me everything,' interjected Makeev. 'After all, we're old comrades.'

'What do you want me to tell you?' The Baron spent the whole night writing letters and issuing orders. He didn't say anything. 'You can go and ask him if you like.'

'But seriously,' persisted Makeev, 'is that all you can tell me?'

'That's all.'

'Well what about Semionov?'

'A few weeks ago he went on leave for reasons of health. If you ask me, he's backing out of the game. He's done for,' Zabiakin burst out, violently. He held out his pipe, which had gone out, and added 'Look at that!' as though it were a conclusive argument.

Ungern came out of the station. As he passed the two officers, he cried, in a voice which ended in a shout.

'To your posts, gentlemen, to your posts!'

As he went on, he dropped a piece of paper which he had crumpled up in his hand. Makeev hurried to pick up

the paper ball, and was on the point of running after the Baron, but his companion caught him by the arm

'Let him go,' he said 'One never knows'

Makeev unfolded the piece of paper Across a telegraph blank narrow strips of tape stood out

'Chita Situation grave Stop In view events recommend immediate departure direction Aksha Stop Sato will meet you frontier Stop Captain Sudzuki'

'You see,' said Zabiakin, 'it's just as I told you'
He took off his cap and passed his hand over his bald head
'Still, I should never have believed it'

'What frontier does Sudzuki mean?' asked Makeev

'The Mongolian frontier, of course It must be, when he talks about Aksha That's on the way to the frontier'

A soldier came out of the Baron's bungalow at the run

'Colonel Laurenz!' he shouted, in a frightened voice
'His Excellency wants Colonel Laurenz' His voice died away inside the station

A few moments later, Laurenz hurried across to Ungern's quarters As he passed, Makeev and Zabiakin turned round and pretended to be studying the sky
Another flight of storks was just passing over

The sound of a horse's gallop rang out at the other end of the street A little beast with a tangled mane dashed along it, zigzagging from one side to the other As it drew level with the two officers, it dropped in a heap in the dust With its head lying on one side, and its muzzle blowing big red bubbles, the horse stared up at the sky with a wild eye It soon grew dim

'That's a Mongol beast,' said Makeev 'I wonder what's become of its rider'

Zabiakin waved his hand vaguely towards the horizon

'Irregulars,' he said 'If only the man were here, we should soon know what it was all about'

He went across to the station, and came back with a

Mongol soldier The man squatted down beside the beast
His expression turned serious and sad

'Dead,' he said 'Horse dead Good horse '

'You can cry over it some other time,' interrupted
Makeev impatiently and he gave the soldier a kick 'To
whom does it belong?'

'Belong Jei He dead '

'Who's Jei?'

'Friend mine Went away yesterday '

'Went away where?'

'General Baron tell Jei go Haidobulak '

The two officers exchanged glances

'Ungern must have sent him to the Buriat company at
Haidobulak,' said Zabiakin 'I remember now The
Baron had a message for Chernov '

If Chernov wasn't warned in time, he reckoned rapidly,
it's all up with him Zabiakin had not forgotten his fifty
lashes

The Mongol soldier took off the horse's saddle, and
extracted from it a bit of paper folded in two

'Give that to me,' said Makeev

He unfolded it A few words were scribbled on it in
sprawling, clumsy handwriting

'Addressee gone away, leaving no address,' it read
'Return to sender '

Zabiakin gave vent to a long whistle

'So that's that,' he said, and he lit his pipe again

Two hours later three hundred men entered Dauria
Almost all of them had flat noses and prominent cheek-
bones They had with them a gun and three machine-
guns Lieutenant Chernov headed them

Laurenz went forward to meet him

'How are you, Colonel?' said Chernov, showing all his
teeth as he smiled 'I received orders from the Baron
to bring my men back to Dauria at once So here we are
You haven't got anything to drink, have you? I've an idea

that the irregulars were hard on our heels I'm very glad I got here Could I go and have a rest?"

'Out of the question,' replied the colonel 'Take your men to the station, and then come and see me'

All along the platform, in the waiting-room, on the track, soldiers had settled down, standing, sitting, lying beside their haversacks They looked as though they wouldn't stir even if a train came along Only a few officers were busy They made their way through the crowd of soldiers, leaving a click of spurs in their wake A sentry was posted outside the telegraph office He let nobody in

Zabiakin watched Chernov pass, with his black beard framing his smiling lips He's the luck of the devil, that fellow, Zabiakin said to himself

Evening fell The sky was empty The storks had settled on the ponds

A little officer, stout and squat, hurried up to Laurenz

'Colonel,' he asked, 'what are we to do with the two Jews?"

'Time enough, Burdukovski,' said Laurenz 'We'll see about them later'

There was a drumming in the air A plane was flying towards Dauria

'So I'm back in time,' exclaimed the pilot, as he looked down at the ground

Below him Dauria, with its station, its barracks, and its hutments, looked tiny To east and west, as far as the eye could reach, ran two parallel lines, gleaming like ice the Transbaikalian railway The plane started coming down The station showed up, a big khaki blotch As the plane came lower still, the grey-green surface became covered with little reddish rounds soldiers looking up at the plane coming to earth

The observer jumped down to the ground, and hurried

towards the Baron's bungalow. He had scarcely entered it when a shout rang out

'Colonel Laurenz!'

'Colonel Laurenz!' yelled the barracks

'Colonel Laurenz!' clamoured the station

The colonel came out of the telegraph office. He cursed as he strode over the bodies of the men sprawling on the platform

Then there was more shouting

'Lieutenant Chernov! Captain Makeev! Lieutenant Zabiakin! Lieutenant Issak!'

The soldiers rose to their feet, slipped on their haversacks, and assembled on the platform

'Well, what about it?' said a beardless Buriat, addressing himself to nobody in particular

'Looks like it,' drawled another soldier into his straw-coloured beard

The officers disappeared. It got late. Silence descended on the station. On benches and across sleepers the soldiers lay down again pell-mell. Their features settled into sleep. One lay with his legs drawn up under him and his arms flung out. Another had his fists clenched, his jaw set, and his forehead furrowed with lines. A third breathed fast, with his half-open mouth disclosing teeth yellowed by nicotine

At this moment the soldiers were far away from Dauria. They had gone home for a few hours: the Tatar with his face pitted with smallpox to the dusty streets of Astrakhan, the little peasant boy to his village on the Volga, where, every night, he reaped wheat. The sentries drowsed, with their foreheads resting against the triangular bayonets fixed to their rifles

The telegraphist made his appearance on the threshold of his office. In his outstretched hand he held a long strip of paper. He looked as though he were going to throw a streamer into the midst of the sleeping mob

The officers were assembled in Ungern's quarters. The Baron wound up

'And see that everything is ready. We start in two hours.'

'And where are we going?' ventured Laurenz.

Ungern stopped folding a document.

'You will simply follow me,' he said curtly.

Now that the cell was gradually getting lighter, Semion still could not pluck up courage to look at the thing that lay in the corner. He kept his face obstinately towards the wall. All night long he had stood there huddled up, motionless, not daring to stir for fear of brushing against Abram's corpse. The cell was only nine feet by six.

But I must, he said to himself, I must. Slowly he turned round. He squatted down and looked in front of him. He could see a light-coloured shape lying on the floor. On all fours, still slowly, he crawled towards it. It was an endless business.

Semion stopped, held his breath, and poked his head forward. Abram seemed to be lying asleep, gracefully, like a woman. A ray of sunlight fell on his face, crept into the curves of his lips, spread across his forehead, and set his eyelashes sparkling with miniature rainbows.

Semion started his inspection. He could see only within a tiny radius right in front of his eyes. He changed his position a little, rubbing his face up against Abram's body. He dragged himself forward on his knees, turning his head as though he were sniffing the scent of death.

Abram's chest was bare, bluish-white, and hairless. Below his prominent ribs his belly made its appearance swollen, enormous, with the navel sticking out like a closed eye. Lower still, the flesh showed black and blue and crimson, shapeless, covered with clots of blood.

On the platform N C O's kicked the soldiers awake. The blond boy who had just reaped the last cock of wheat

rubbed his eyes and yawned loudly The Tatar stretched himself and looked round him for the streets of Astrakhan For a moment or two the station was filled with the scents of the sea, of wild flowers, of oil-fields A bearded soldier stood up, unbuttoned his breeches, and made water on the track as solemnly as though he were praying

Broadsides of blasphemy straddled the station The aeroplane, automobiles, guns and machine-guns, horses and camels and dogs and men made their way out of Dauria

With a revolver in one hand and a key in the other, Burdukovski hurried to the prison

Lurching on its springs, the general's car made its way to the head of the column In it Ungern sat with closed eyes, stiff and still

An early flight of storks flew over the soldiers The column set off, turning its back to the sun the sun of dawn that had just awakened Japan, the sun of dawn that shone on a dead station, dead barracks, a dead prison

'July 10, 1920 —It is reported from Harbin that General Baron Ungern has been relieved of his command by Semionov, but has refused to submit to this decision and led his men against Dauria, which is occupied by the ataman's men. Ungern's division took part in the recent operations in the east of Transbaikalia. At the end of these operations, instead of marching his men back to Dauria, Ungern quartered them 150 *vershs* east of his usual headquarters. It was in these circumstances that Semionov issued his order relieving Ungern of his command. Learning of this measure against him, the Baron immediately assembled his men and marched them towards Dauria. To-night news of an engagement is expected at any moment. It is believed, however, that the Japanese troops will endeavour to prevent any battle between Ungern's division and Semionov's forces. Telegraphic communication with Chita has been interrupted since yesterday.'

The Voice of the Fatherland, Vladivostok

'August 13 —Baron Ungern-Sternberg has concentrated his division at Dauria station. He appears to have decided to withdraw to Aksha, in the direction of Mongolia. Accordingly, he has already issued orders for the evacuation of his supply stores.'

Evening News, Vladivostok

'August 18 —According to the latest information received, Baron Ungern, at the head of a picked force, has left Dauria for Aksha, where he hopes to recruit further

forces For this reason he has taken a large quantity of arms with him

'September 17 —It is reported from Chita that, in accordance with Semionov's orders, General Ungern has returned from Aksha to Chita The ataman has forbidden him to leave the latter town

'September 19 —According to information received by Semionov's personal staff, Ungern and his troops have broken off relations with the supreme command of the Army of the Far East

'September 21 —In the region of Aksha, near the Chinese frontier, a regrouping of the forces under the command of Baron Ungern is to be observed The Baron has at his disposal not only an adequate supply of munitions, but also several automobiles and two aeroplanes '

Far East Review, Vladivostok

'Order of the day of the Army of the Far East

'Baron Ungern, commanding a division of irregulars, disapproving of the policy recently pursued by Commander-in-Chief Ataman Semionov, has withdrawn on his own responsibility towards the frontier of Mongolia in the region south-east of the town of Aksha In consequence, I hereby strike Major-General Ungern and his division off the strength of the Army of the Far East '

'October 5 —Ungern's division is at present divided into two parts The smaller part is under his personal command, and its objective is to attract the Reds towards it and thus distract them from the main body of the troops and the supply train The two portions of the division hope to cut their way through the Red troops and reach the region of Irkutsk, where the Baron aims at provoking an insurrection against the Bolsheviks A force of Mongols has joined Ungern at Aksha

'October 9 —Baron Ungern contemplates making his way along the Chinese frontier with the object of provoking an insurrection against Soviet authority on the borders

of Southern Siberia. He hopes to create centres of unrest all along the Chinese frontier, or, in other words, throughout the South of Siberia.'

Far East Review, Vladivostok

'October 18—The Chinese have disarmed Ungern's troops in Mongolia

'October 19—According to trustworthy information, the irregulars have occupied Dauria

'October 19—Ungern's bands, which had established their military base south of Aksha, have been defeated by the troops of the People's Revolutionary Army. Ungern took to flight, abandoning a number of killed and wounded, millions of cartridges, and thousands of rifles and grenades, together with a large quantity of munitions. The three hundred wagons concentrated by our troops in anticipation of transporting booty proved insufficient. We made a large number of prisoners

'Pekin, October 25—The commander-in-chief of the Chinese troops at Urga has sent information to Peking that a body of Russian White Guards numbering three thousand have withdrawn into Mongolia.'

Izvestia, Moscow

'October 30—(*Reuter*) The information from a Chinese source, according to which the Russians who have penetrated into Outer Mongolia are Red irregulars, appears to be incorrect. The fact that General Ungern was recently on the Mongolian frontier, coupled with the close relations which he maintains with Semionov, suggests that Ungern is at the head of the invaders. The whole purpose of this invasion is extremely obscure.'

North China Herald, Shanghai

'October 31—Irregulars have routed Ungern's rearguard and taken possession of his base. Ungern's main body are said to be advancing towards Urga and to have

cut the lines of communication with Peking. The Chinese have requested assistance from the Soviet Government.

'November 2 —The news of Ungern's defeat is incorrect. Detachments of the Baron's forces have occupied Troitsko-Savsk, on the Russo-Mongolian frontier, and taken possession of the Soviet supply stores.'

Liberty, Vladivostok

'November 2 —Chinese troops have disarmed a detachment of Ungern's forces, consisting of two hundred cavalry, whom they encountered in Mongolian territory.

Izvestia, Moscow

'Peking, November 2 —Ungern's troops have suffered a defeat in the region of Chakhar.'

Liberty, Vladivostok

'Chita, November 2 —Ungern's forces have suffered a severe defeat in the region of Manchuli, on the Chinese Eastern Railway. Ungern's front has been broken.'

Far East Review, Vladivostok

'November 2 —Baron Ungern's troops have arrived in sight of Urga, where they fought a battle with the forces of the Chinese authorities. There were heavy losses on both sides. The Chinese have little hope of repelling Ungern.'

Izvestia, Moscow

'Since the tragic death of Admiral Kolchak, the gravest events have succeeded one another in Siberia and the Far East. The Red Army has taken possession of practically the whole territory from the Urals to Lake Baikal. The leaders of the Russian national cause, generals and atamans, have been forced to take to flight: some into Chinese Turkestan, others into China, others again under the protection of the troops of the Rising Sun.

'Less than a year ago, the Siberian Government declared: "At this moment one single authority exists over the whole extent of Siberia. An army, young in experience

but strong in morale, has again been created. A legitimate Government is functioning. ” This was the last declaration by the Government. A few months have passed, and there is no longer any authority, any Government, or any army.

‘Russian patriots based all their hopes on the Ataman Semionov, whom Kolchak had designated as his representative, and whom our Japanese allies seemed to have made up their minds to support. During the night of October 20, however, irregulars entered Chita, and the ataman made his escape by aeroplane, taking his gold reserve with him. The Japanese did not raise a hand, and the Communists carried the day. The populace gave them an enthusiastic welcome everywhere.

‘It would seem that it is now time to refer to the one man who has hitherto opposed any resistance to the Red thrust. In short, while the Ataman Kalmikov was abandoning the town of Habarovsk, while the Ataman Annenkov was allowing himself to be interned by the Chinese authorities, while the Ataman Semionov was making his escape without taking leave of his men, what became of General Baron Ungern-Sternberg?

‘He did not take to flight, abandoning his army to the enemy’s mercy, nor did he seek refuge outside the frontiers of his native land. He disappeared, but he disappeared with his division.

‘Though General Ungern has always been regarded as the Ataman Semionov’s subordinate, it may be said that for some months past he had refused to recognize the authority of his superior. At his headquarters in Dauria he followed nobody’s advice but his own, and, over the ataman’s head, he maintained friendly relations with the Japanese command. Envoys of the Baron’s were reported to have been seen on several occasions in Urga, in Mukden, the headquarters of Chang-Tso-lin, and even in Peking.

‘Ungern, we repeat, has disappeared. Where is he at

present? He is nowhere, and he is everywhere News-agency telegrams and newspaper reports about him swarm with contradictions

'Only one fact is certain About the middle of September, Ungern and his division left Dauria, taking supplies and munitions with them Since that time all trace of him has been lost

'The Baron's presence was reported in the region of Aksha There would normally be nothing remarkable about that, since Aksha is situated only about one hundred and thirty miles south of Dauria But what complicates matters is that, about a week later, the newspapers announced that Ungern was marching on Verkhni-Udinsk He was reported almost simultaneously to be at Petrovski Zavod, at Kluchevskaya, near Nijni-Selenguinsk, and at Troitsko-Savsk all points some sixty miles distant from one another

'On one and the same day, Ungern won a victory outside Troitsko-Savsk, and suffered a defeat near Manchuli, at the other end of Transbaikalia His troops were approaching Verkhni-Udinsk, and, at the same time, they were marching on Urga, two hundred and fifty miles to the south If it were announced to-morrow that Ungern was in sight of Irkutsk or at the gates of Pekin, we could merely confess our ignorance about where he was, and admit that anything is possible with this devil of a man

'The Baron's troops are well armed, and probably better disciplined than any other Siberian army ever was He is doubtless supported in his efforts by the representatives of a certain Far Eastern Power We shall hear more of him

'Meanwhile, we should very much like to know what has really become of the Baron since he left Dauria We address ourselves to all our readers, in Transbaikalia as well as in Manchuria and Mongolia Can any of them inform us? What has become of General Baron Ungern-Sternberg? Where is General Ungern?'

THE INSIDE of the tent was poorly lit. The gleams which escaped from the hearth through clouds of smoke cast red blotches on the faces of Ungern and his guest, a Mongol lama, and then were lost in the obscurity at the back of the tent, where Laurenz and Lieutenant Issak were moving about.

‘Where does Your Excellency desire me to begin?’ asked the lama, who was squatting on the ground.

‘Begin at the beginning,’ replied Ungern. For his part, he was sitting on a chair, which looked almost unreal, so unexpected was its presence in that tent.

The sound of faint laughter, instantly suppressed, sounded in the dark background of the tent.

‘It was in the year of the Mouse,’ he said, ‘that Mongolia . . .’

‘You’re not with Mongol shepherds now,’ Ungern interrupted him. ‘There’s no point in being affected.’

‘Just as you like,’ conceded the lama. ‘It’s all a matter of habit. For my part, I have some affection for our calendar.’

‘Still, when you were in Petersburg, at the Polytechnic Institute . . .’

‘I may point out,’ remarked the Mongol softly, ‘that at this moment we are no longer in Petersburg. However, just as you like. As I was saying, it was in the year 1912 that Outer Mongolia seceded from China and proclaimed its independence, with the support of Russia, which lost no time in establishing a protectorate over us.’

‘Over you?’

‘Yes, over Mongolia, in short ’

The lama shook a little snuff out of a bottle hanging from his belt, and drew it up his nostrils, with obvious disgust

‘The temporal power passed to him who had always been our spiritual sovereign the Living Buddha, the eighth reincarnation of Jebtsun-Damba-Hutukhtu, the Enthroned by the Multitude ’

The lama rose to his feet and saluted

‘There you go again,’ said Ungern ‘Sit down You ought to know that the Mongols don’t salute In what Guard regiment did you learn to do that?’

‘For my part, I never served in the Guards,’ growled the lama ‘It was all right for you fellows I can salute my sovereign any way I like ’

He forced himself to take some more snuff

‘That’s not all,’ said Ungern ‘I know the history of Mongolia better than you do Since the war, at least Get on with it, Japaranov ’

‘All right ’ The Mongol sat down again ‘But I’d be glad if you’d call me Sato ’

He was at a disadvantage, but he was fighting for his prestige Whatever Ungern might say, whatever he might think, he was only a White, a European The Mongols would never recognize him as their leader

‘Well, get on with it, Sato,’ snapped Ungern impatiently

‘As you are not interested in our pre-war history,’ Sato went on, ‘I shall pass in silence over the years which followed our declaration of independence I shall merely mention that, after 1912, those who achieved our freedom were all sent to the other world, with the help of poison, in order that they might reincarnate themselves ’

Sato felt pleased with himself When he took the trouble, he could be witty—witty in the European way.

‘Then came the war,’ he pursued, ‘and then came the

revolution. The officers of the Guards were forced to leave Petersburg for the time being, and that shook the prestige of the Russian Empire a little.

'Thanks for the information,' said Ungern. 'I'm still listening.'

'I'm going on. At the end of the year of the Sheep'—Sato glanced at the Baron, who waved his hand impatiently—'or, if you prefer it, at the end of 1919, the Chinese general Hsu Shu-cheng, nicknamed "Little Hsu", in command of a brigade entrusted with the defence of the north-west frontier of Mongolia, presented himself before the Prime Minister of the Urga Government, and, in the friendliest way in the world, confronted him with a choice between these alternatives. Either the Mongols would hand over to him, within the next twenty-four hours, a petition addressed to the President of the Chinese Republic, begging the President to take them back into the great family of peoples who made up the Celestial Empire, or else the general would put the Hutukhtu and the Prime Minister into an automobile, with all the respect due to their rank, and take them to Peking. After this, "Little Hsu" withdrew, but he had taken the precaution of surrounding the palace with his men. As you probably know, the petition which he demanded was spontaneously signed within the next twenty-four hours, and thus the Chinese General Staff's car was spared a journey which was really quite unnecessary.'

Sato paused.

'What age is the Hutukhtu now?' asked Ungern.

'The age which he may have reached in the course of his latest incarnation is a matter of small importance.'

'Do you really believe that—you, an engineer?'

'Do you believe in God, Baron?' retorted Sato. He added, 'The Living Buddha is a man of middle age.'

'And what about his character?'

'The Hutukhtu is very fond of animals. You must see his menagerie.'

'And what about his brains?'

'He's very much interested in learning.'

'And is he a man of determination?'

'This is Mongolia, General.'

Ungern said nothing for a moment or two. Then he remarked:

'So you don't believe in reincarnation. That's a pity. Get on with your history.'

' "Little Hsu," ' Sato continued, in a flat tone of voice, 'went back to Peking, where he was hailed as a hero by the Anfu Party, to which he belonged. The Anfus were entirely devoted to Japan. An Anfu enthusiast went so far as to propose the erection of a statue in the general's honour. The three first days of 1920 were proclaimed holidays throughout China. They were intended to celebrate the end of Mongolian autonomy, though their official pretext was the bestowal upon the Hutukhtu of a title: "*I shang fu hua*", which means "He who helps goodness and encourages education".'

'Meanwhile "Little Hsu" returned to Urga. He summoned the Hutukhtu and his ministers to the temple. There, after keeping him waiting an hour and a half, he presented the Hutukhtu with a seal, a gift from the President of the Chinese Republic, which was adorned with new coloured signs, but no longer bore the title: "Khan of Outer Mongolia". The general's troops were reinforced. There was really nothing for the Living Buddha to do but help goodness and encourage education. All this happened just at the time when the Allies were letting Kolchak down . . . '

'I know,' said Ungern. 'You are well informed. But, as you're an engineer, you might be less long-winded.'

'Just as you like,' said Sato drily. 'A force of military police, armed with bludgeons, was formed in Urga. The

Mongols avoided coming into the capital. The lamas predicted an early end of Chinese domination. The authorities were short of money. The soldiers were not paid. The Frontier Bank, created by the Chinese, issued notes which were nicknamed "camels", because the engraving represented a caravan attacked by brigands. The troops got mutinous. "Little Hsu" returned to Peking just in time to see Chang Tso-lin and Tsao-kun expel the Anfu from power. "Little Hsu" himself was put on the retired list in July. Since then Mongolia has been plunged in a state of anarchy. This state of anarchy has lasted for months. 1920 hasn't

'1920,' repeated Ungern. 'Once you get going, you can talk European. Why not say "the year of the Monkey"?' The monkey is an animal of good omen, particularly favourable to Japan—mark that, Sato! On the other hand, it's true that marriages contracted under the sign of the monkey are unhappy and end in divorce. Probably because all the men have gone to the war. Did you know that, my dear engineer? You didn't, eh? You are taking snuff. That's bad. I don't understand you, Sato. You call yourself a Mongol, you wear a lama's red robe, and you carry an automatic strapped to your belt.'

'Well, you don't expect me to carry a bow and arrows, do you?' growled Sato. 'If it comes to that, I'm wondering what you

'Are you there, Issak?' asked Ungern.

'Yes, Your Excellency.'

'Go and inspect the camp. Then come back and report to me. You may dismiss, too, Laurenz.'

'Very good, Your Excellency.'

In the dark, it looked as though the two officers had passed through the tent-canvas. The only trace of their passage was that it became studded with stars.

All was quiet in the camp. Issak stumbled against stones as he made his way in the dark. Out of the shadows

emerged sometimes the supercilious head of a camel, sometimes a sentry who stiffened to attention. In a hollow a group of men were squatting round a fire. Its flames rose up straight in the still air. Issak approached the group. A guttural voice was talking Mongol. Issak kicked a Cossack to his feet. He was a very young fellow, blond and chubby-cheeked. He stood at attention, with his eyes shifting from side to side guiltily.

‘What’s that fellow talking about?’ demanded Issak. The boy felt very much like laughing.

‘Oh, he’s only talking nonsense, Your Excellency. Just to pass the time.’

‘But what was he saying?’

‘He was saying that this country is full of *chulmuss*: she-devils, no less! They’re as thin as your finger, with spindly legs and little brass noses.’

When he caught sight of the officer, the story-teller had stopped talking. All the men had risen to their feet. There were Mongols, half-breeds of Slav and Yellow, and Russians. Issak stared at one of them. His fair curls looked like a fur cap. He must come from Riazan, the lieutenant decided: Riazan or Toula.

‘Where do you come from?’ he asked sternly.

‘My family live near Riazan, Your Excellency,’ replied the soldier briskly. Doubtless he was a good talker, a good singer, and a good wench.

‘All right,’ said Issak, and he went on with his walk. A little animal scuttled away under his feet. Behind him the story-teller took up his tale again.

Slowly the lieutenant went back to Ungern’s tent. The Baron and Sato were sitting in silence at the fire, which was nearly out.

‘Yes,’ said Ungern, resuming the conversation, ‘we must write to Chang Tso-lin. So long as he remains neutral, I can take care of the others.’

He turned towards Issak.

'Nothing to report, Your Excellency,' said the lieutenant, and it struck him suddenly that in this country the flaxen hair of a boy from Riazan was even more odd than she-devils with brass noses 'Nothing to report,' he repeated

The country was not quite a regular desert. There were sand, stones, bare bushes, stretches of snow, scanty springs, tiny ponds petrified by the cold and dried up by the sun, in the distance, the pointed tents of nomads and the shimmer of sheep grazing, and always the wind

A shepherd, wearing a cap as pointed as the tents, and clad in a long robe which might have been yellow ten years ago—it was a sin to wash, and one never changed one's clothes till they fell off in rags—drowsed clamped to his horse's saddle, with his legs curved in under the beast's sides. With eyes half-closed, he glanced now and again at the empty horizon, the sky in which the sun was contained within the circling flight of a vulture, and the sheep which thronged round him. If you asked him to whom the flock belonged, he replied

'To the Hutukhtu, to the monasteries'

Then he questioned you in his turn

'Any news?'

You set off again, the shepherd, with his curiosity unsatisfied, and his sheep disappeared behind you, and another horseman came into sight, moving slowly, this time in the midst of a herd of emaciated horses, under the same sun flanked by a vulture

'To whom does this herd belong?' you asked

'To the Hutukhtu, to the monasteries'

Ungern's Asiatic division made its way slowly. Long before it had reached the horizon of the start of the day's march, night fell, with an age-old power, an age-old purity, vast and desert as Mongolia itself. In the suddenly darkened sky swelled a yellow moon, with prominent cheekbones, slanting eyes, and a flattened nose—a moon

which also seemed to belong to the monasteries, to the Hutukhtu

Now and again the division met a caravan. Black dots appeared in the distance, and grew bigger until you could make out the gait of camels. Then Ungern shouted to one of his officers, and at once a group of horsemen detached themselves from the column and galloped towards the travellers. As they approached, Ungern's men spread out fan-wise. Sato followed the attack through field-glasses—drawing blue-prints had got the better of his nomad's eyesight—and fancied he could make out tense faces, rearing horses—a picture like the one engraved on the Mongolian bank-notes. Beside him, Ungern tapped his boot with his whip and said nothing.

A few shots, and it was all over. The Cossacks came back, rounding up the camels with their burdens. The column set off again. The men's boots were still sound, and the horses were still fresh.

At night Ungern wrote letters. He wrote to Manchuli, to Urga, to Peking, to Dairen. He wrote to his agents, to his suppliers, to his spies, to Chinese generals, to Russian consuls. He wrote also to that former brigand chief, now become marshal, friend of the Japanese, lord of Mukden and all-powerful emperor of Manchuria, Chang Tso-lin. Chang Tso-lin whose insolent submission and indifferent silence made Peking tremble, Chang Tso-lin who had the best piloted planes and the best armoured trains in all China, Chang Tso-lin whom Ungern must wheedle and flatter and fawn upon and bow down to for another two months, another three months, another six months.

One night Ungern stopped writing, went out of his tent, passing the rigid sentry, and, planting himself with his feet slightly apart, inspected the sky with exacting eyes. The moonlight picked out his prominent Adam's apple and his moustache, making it look silvery.

The camp slept. Alone in the night, Ungern stared at

his star When his head started going round, he turned back to his tent, where his unfinished letter awaited him

‘ Be good enough’, wrote Ungern, ‘to inform the most honoured Marshal Chang Tso-lin that his humble servant

The Harbin newspapers were still reporting the Baron’s presence in Transbaikalia, inside the Russo-Mongolian frontier, and Semionov was still only thinking about making his escape from Chita, when Ungern and his men came in sight of Urga

On the way, their ranks had been swelled by Mongol horsemen impressed, together with their short-legged mounts, as the column passed through encampments The women, with their broad cheekbones, tucked up their skirts docilely as the Cossacks came in sight The nomads’ tents were not worth the trouble of setting on fire Petty princes and lamas accepted presents ceremoniously Flocks of sheep, with their muzzles surrounded by a haze of steaming breath, followed the column

There had been a few desertions, but not many The memory of the officers who had gone over to Semionov, and then been burned alive by the Baron when he laid hands on them, acted as a deterrent even more powerful than the desert all round and the Reds in the rear

The officers who had stayed with the division or joined it—General Rezhukhin, Colonel Laurenz, Colonel Sipailov, Burdukovski, Issak, Makeev, Zabiakin, and Chernov, who was in command of the baggage-train, together with a few others—had nothing to lose and their well-worn skins to save

The deserters had been replaced by new recruits Transbaikalian farmers who had heard that the Bolsheviks requisitioned wheat at a fixed price, Cossacks, sometimes the sons of these farmers, whose slanting eyes betrayed an element of Yellow blood, Great Russian mercenaries

whom seven years of war had bumped about from the Masurian Lakes to Vladivostok, leaving them with gold stars on their shoulders and psychoses in their brains, Buriat nationalists, Mongolian autonomists, Chinese fleeing from one wretchedness to another, Koreans exchanging a frying-pan of terror for a fire of terror

There were also a few Japanese, clad as civilians or as common soldiers, who must not let themselves be taken alive, for, if they were made prisoners, they would be disavowed by their Government and denounced as deserters, outlaws, and common criminals. So they themselves, who were mere landmarks along the path of Japanese conquest of the continent, were bound to confess, even before a firing-party

In all, including the veterans, there were some three thousand men, divided into three groups, equipped with field-guns and machine-guns, and ready to march. In front of them lay Urga.

'There's our capital,' said Sato, who had come to take leave of Ungern. He had fulfilled his task as guide, and he was going back to those who had sent him.

'I suppose you'll soon be seeing Captain Sudzuki,' said the Baron. 'By the way, what's the date?'

'We are in the phase of the full moon in the tenth month of the year of the Chicken,' replied the engineer.

'All right, all right!' said Ungern impatiently.

'We are outside the capital of Mongolia,' Sato reminded him.

'So,' said Ungern, 'will you tell Sudzuki?'

'Good-bye, Baron! And good luck to you and your Asiatic division!'

'Will you tell Sudzuki that?'

'My best respects, Your Excellency!'

As he wheeled his horse, Sato in his red robe, gripping his mount's sides with his bow-legs, did not look in the least like an engineer.

CAPTAIN HAMAJI EZOE, Japanese military agent at Urga, arrived in Pekin on November 22, in a car belonging to a European commercial firm. The journey had passed without hindrance—no burst tyre, no running out of petrol, no attack by Ungern's men, who, for that matter, were encamped farther north.

At one halt the Japanese officer had met a Chinese police officer, and gone out of his way to strike up a conversation with him.

'China,' he said, good-naturedly, 'is always suspicious of Japan. But there's no reason why she should be. Japan's one idea is to be a sincere friend of China and engage in cordial collaboration with her. Let's be friends.'

'Yes,' replied the Chinese, and he said nothing all the rest of the evening.

This was the only incident in the course of the journey. Captain Ezoe jotted it down in his note-book, just after a mention of two companies of Chinese infantry which the car had met near Uddi, about midway between Urga and the Great Wall.

On his arrival in Pekin he called on the Japanese military attaché, and then went to the hotel where he usually stayed.

It was here that, two days later, a news-agency correspondent hailed him as he came into the lounge. The journalist was sitting in an armchair, with a glass of whisky in front of him.

'I take it neat,' he said, by way of greeting. 'How about you?'

'I don't drink,' replied the captain 'What can I do for you?'

'You're just a Paul Pry' The American broke into a laugh 'You want to know everything You ought to take a lesson in patience from the great people among whom we live, and whom you are so bent on wresting from their meditations When I say "you", I mean, generally speaking, Japan'

Ezoe barely smiled He was torn between the feeling of boredom which anything futile always aroused in him and fear of a trap

'You want to know what you can do for me? What can a Japanese officer do for an American journalist? Can't you guess? Share his whisky? No Accompany him to a brothel? No Reveal the plan of Japanese penetration into Manchuria to him? Alas, no Then what remains? Come, come, Captain, haven't you got it yet? You're just back from Urga, and still you don't understand? You've been an eye-witness of the fighting in progress round that town You may have had to dodge some of Ungern's bullets—by the way, does he drink, do you know? And still you don't realize that the whole world, in my humble person, is hanging on your authoritative lips?'

'So that's it, eh?'

'That's it And no kidding, please My agency has instructed me to interview you It's worth about fifty lines Now I'm ready,' added the journalist, in a business-like voice, as he took his note-book and his fountain-pen out of his pocket

'Excuse me a moment I've got some orders to give I'll be back in a few minutes'

Ezoe crossed the lounge, made his way to the telephonist, and asked for the Japanese Legation Three minutes later, in a precise voice, he dictated

'Urga is at present surrounded on three sides by Russian and Mongol forces Three bodies, consisting of two

thousand seven hundred to three thousand men in all, have marched on the town from east, west, and north. The garrison of the town actually consists of a mixed brigade, four thousand strong, and a cavalry regiment. Reinforcements are arriving from Kalgan, Sui-yan, and elsewhere every day.'

As he jotted down shorthand, the journalist was careful to make Captain Ezoe's sometimes hesitant English colourless and impersonal.

'Hara and other localities situated to the north of Urga,' he went on writing, 'are the granary of the besieged capital of Outer Mongolia. At present only sufficient supplies for a fortnight remain in Urga, and efforts are being made to obtain as much as possible from Hara. The Russians, who are aware of the situation, attacked Hara on the . . . What was the date? You don't remember? Oh, well, it doesn't matter . . . attacked Hara a short time ago, and reduced part of the village to ashes. They also felled fifty telegraph-posts on the Urga-Kiakhta road, in order to cut communications between these two important centres. And now tell me about the military operations.'

Captain Ezoe gave technical details: the disposition of the troops, the attacks and counter-attacks, the fire-frequency, the calibre of the guns. The American jotted down:

'October 26, first battle. Violent. From October 30 to November 4, twenty minor engagements and five important ones. Artillery and machine-guns. Reign of terror in Urga. Streets swept with shells and bullets. Leaving town forbidden. Citizens ordered to stay indoors. Travelers imprisoned by Chinese, who fear uprising in Urga provoked by attack from outside.'

'After six days' fighting,' Captain Ezoe went on, 'the attackers retired twenty miles from Urga. They maintained the strictest discipline during the operations, and, contrary to what usually happens in that country, com-

mitted no acts of brigandage. Still, from the military point of view their tactics lacked skill. In fact, let me tell you, if they had pressed their attack home a little harder on the first day, the 26th, they would have taken possession of Urga. Since then the garrison has been continually reinforced, and it is improbable that the besiegers will succeed in breaking through the defence-line.'

'And in that case?'

'The only tactics the attackers can pursue is to encircle the town, stop all supplies, and starve out the inhabitants . . .'

The journalist had got his fifty lines. But he asked one more question.

'Is the leader of the attackers really Baron Ungern?'

The Japanese officer's face was a mask.

'The Chinese commander in Urga does not believe it,' he said. 'In general, it is difficult to be sure about the composition of this force and the objects it is pursuing. It is assumed that it includes some of Ungern's men, some Buriats, and some Mongolian autonomists seeking to avenge their fellow-countrymen who were massacred by the Chinese at Kiakhta last spring. As for the rumours which are current concerning the presence of Japanese troops among the attackers, they are certainly false.'

'But . . .'

'One moment. It appears from statements by prisoners that there are in fact from ten to twenty Japanese in the force. If this is so—and I doubt it—they can only be escaped criminals who have eluded the vigilance of the Japanese authorities.'

The American closed his note-book and took his leave.

Drinks like a fish, said the Japanese officer to himself. And they want to keep us out of California!

Sitting in his office, the journalist ran over the latest telegrams.

'Pekin. It is stated that General Feng Yu-hsiang will

shortly proceed to Urga to assume the command-in-chief
Harbin Eight cases of bubonic plague are reported
at Haular ,

The American slid a sheet of paper into his typewriter
Before referring to his note-book, he wrote his introduction,
without looking at the keyboard

'Pekin, November 24 —Captain Hamaji Ezoe, Japanese
military agent at Urga, who arrived in Peking on November
22 to arrange for the evacuation of Japanese residents,
has communicated to me his impressions about ,

THE attack had failed Ungern and his Asiatic division retired to the north-east of Urga, taking their wounded with them Luckily, the Chinese did not pursue them

There was a shortage of food, and there was a shortage of fodder For three weeks there was no flour and no salt The camels and the horses suffered as much as the men The commissariat officers kept out of the way until night-fall for fear of meeting the Baron Ungern strode through the camp with his whip always ready to strike Colonel Laurenz, wounded in the arm during the attack, lay in his tent At his bedside General Rezukhin lost himself in endless meditation over his favourite game of patience 'Napoleon's Tomb'

One day the Baron let it be known that alcoholic drink was forbidden, on pain of severe penalties But there was a shortage of alcohol too

Ungern was fond of saying that war feeds on war It was with these words that he wound up his instructions to Lieutenant Zabiakin The officer clicked his heels together, hastily assembled his Cossacks, and led them at a gallop in the direction of the Kalgan-Urga road

The next day but one the first caravan stopped by Zabiakin's men arrived in camp Further supplies followed at short intervals There was salt, there was flour, there was even champagne

But the officers were bored There was not a single woman within thirty miles round As he supervised the baggage-train, Chernov had stopped smiling He had even given up trimming his beard He had endured

hunger and thirst without a murmur, but he could not stand chastity Every night dreams such as he had as a boy of fourteen assailed him mercilessly

The water-courses were frozen Ungern's division had gone into winter quarters on the Kerulen, to the north-east of the Mongolian capital Its bank bristled with tents, which the thickening snow clamped to the ground Paths crossed the camp in all directions In the morning the men drilled Bayonets transfixed blocks of dry wood, and shots re-echoed from the rocks

Twice emissaries had brought Ungern orders from Semionov The Baron barely glanced at them He was not taking orders from anybody

The Whites were still maintaining themselves in Vladivostok and on the coast, thanks to the shelter of the Japanese troops But the soldiers no longer had it all their own way A new dynasty had appeared on the horizon the dynasty of the merchants They had filled their warehouses with flax and copper, coal and hemp, and by now they controlled the traffic of the port and the railway Freight-trains had taken the place of troop-trains

The Baron doubled his hours of drill and multiplied his punishments

Frequently he had his horse saddled and set off alone, with no escort The shoes of his grey mare, Mashka, sounded the charge on the ground hardened by frost Ungern went to see Mongol princelings

Sitting in their tents, face to face with his princely hosts, he talked to them about the war and about Mongolia The nomads listened to him in silence and agreed with him gravely The Russian general's words vaguely flattered them They offered him milk-foods, alcohol, and tobacco, and accepted his invitation to visit him in his camp

In the monasteries, lamas, bursting with fat and pride, devoted themselves to rapid calculations in the presence

of this man come from the North who was so familiar with their customs and their prophecies. They made ambiguous answers, but their predictions were, on the whole, favourable.

Semionov dispatched a third envoy to the Baron's camp. He, too, returned with no reply. The ice imprisoned in cracks in the rocks started splitting the stone.

The princelings came to return Ungern's visits to them. Clamped to their saddles, they arrived at a gallop, leapt to the ground without touching their stirrups, and made their way, with an awkward, hobbling gait, to the general's tent. Their confabulations with him went on for hours. Captain Sudzuki was invariably present at them.

The Japanese officer had only lately joined Ungern's division. One fine morning, at roll-call, there he was, having dropped into the middle of the camp, nobody knew whence. He was to be seen walking about, with his precise, short steps, from one tent to another, watching the soldiers drill, and roaming round the camp-fires at night. He stared at the officers curiously, but never opened his lips to anybody except the Baron.

It was Sudzuki himself who had asked if he might attend Ungern's receptions of the Mongol princes, and the Baron judged it politic to agree.

The princes were all more or less directly descended from Genghis Khan. Only a score of generations separated them from him: generations of nomads and graziers. They talked about him with affectionate respect as the head of the family. Ungern, in his turn, talked to them about Genghis Khan.

'I have been to Kiev,' he said, 'I have been to Warsaw and to Budapest. Once already the shoes of Mongol horses have trodden the streets of those cities. The West is dying, stricken by the plague of revolution. There are no more princes, no more armies. The slaves have for-

gotten the law. The time has come to rebuild the empire of the great Khans.

‘Scions of Genghis Khan, the blood of the conquerors of the world flows in your veins. Your slaves obey you just as they did a thousand years ago. We shall set off in the footsteps of Genghis. First, China: China whom you have already conquered once, and who is now taking her revenge on you for her past defeats. She despises you, she stops your mouths with pieces of silk: but let her beware! After China, Siberia. Siberia to the yellow race, and never have your horses known such fine pasturage. There is gold, there is silver, and millions of men await us. We shall ride across the continent, and the peoples will rise from the Pacific to the Black Sea: Buriats and Kirghiz, Yakuts and Tibetans.

‘There will be six hundred million of us. Nobody will be able to resist us. The revolted slaves will flee quicker than monkeys, and Moscow will burst like an ox’s bladder under our horses’ hooves. In every country we shall set a king on the throne again, and all these sovereigns will come and pay tribute on the banks of the Kerulen. Scions of Genghis Khan, will you follow me?’

Sudzuki said nothing. The princes talked about titles, pensions, and pieces of silk. Then they set off again, laden with gifts, and Ungern went back to his letter-writing.

One day witnessed the arrival in the camp of Counsellor of State Golubev and his wife.

Around this tall, young woman, with her short nose and her lips painted in a cupid’s bow, floated a reek of perfume which her flight from Transbaikalia, when it was reconquered by the Red army, and her travelling day and night had not sufficed to evaporate. It was a very long time since Ungern’s officers had set eyes on such fair flesh, and such plump flesh, too. They hid themselves behind tents to feast their eyes at leisure on her breasts and her

hips, whose curves were not masked even by her furs

Ungern hated men who wore glasses—and Golubev happened to be short-sighted. The Baron made a face when he was informed of the couple's arrival. He received the Golubevs in his tent, offered them tea, and exerted himself to question them about their common acquaintances.

The Counsellor of State preened himself. Decidedly, he said to himself, this little officer, in a uniform none too spick and span, was not worthy of his reputation. He seemed rather shy, rather dunder-headed. He might be all right as a commander in the field, but that was all. He would be the better for some advice.

In a formal tone of voice, Golubev proceeded to tell the Baron what steps he should take at once. He should strike camp, reach the railway line, obtain free transport to Vladivostok from the Chinese—"They won't refuse you that, I guarantee"—and, once he reached Vladivostok, get into touch with the civic authorities.

Golubev toyed with his glasses. He had come just at the right moment to teach Ungern his business. After all, a Counsellor of State was a kind of general in civil life, with wider experience, not to speak of understanding of affairs and his own personal qualities.

His wife had left him and Ungern alone together. The Baron listened to him without saying a word, attentively, thoughtfully.

All at once, in a low voice, Ungern muttered

"Have him whipped!"

"What did you say, my dear fellow?" asked Golubev, leaning towards him.

"Have him whipped!" shouted the Baron, glaring balefully at his guest's glasses. "He's hand and glove with all those grocers. He's a crook."

The Counsellor of State was seized, hustled away, and debagged.

Makeev went off to tell the news to Madame Golubev. He thought the pretext a good one for making her acquaintance, and felt that a soldier should always try his luck.

'Excuse me, Madame,' he said, 'but the Baron has had your husband whipped.'

'What's that? What do you mean?' Madame Golubev could not make head or tail of it. Makeev explained.

'But . . . but there must be some terrible misunderstanding,' gasped Madame Golubev. 'Surely it can't be true. My husband whipped! And the Baron is so nice! I . . .'

She hurried to Ungern's tent. The Baron was still sitting in the same place. He did not look up at his visitor.

'Baron, Baron,' she simpered, 'one of your officers has just told me that you . . . that . . . Really, she couldn't believe it. . . that my husband has gone,' she wound up.

'Your husband is a crook and a gasbag,' said Ungern, still without looking at her, 'and I've had him whipped.'

'But, Baron, a gentleman like you! . . . Then she burst out: 'How dare you do a thing like that? My husband is a Counsellor of State! I . . . You're a boor, a barbarian! I'll complain about you!'

'Complain away!'

Madame Golubev realized what a ridiculous thing she had said. She and her husband were at the mercy of this man who would not even look at her. She recalled the rumours that were current about Ungern's craziness. She was dealing with a madman, and there was nobody to protect her. If only he would look up! She tried to smile, and a strangled sound emerged from her lips.

'Baron,' she said, 'I wanted to meet you so much. It was I who got my husband to come and see you. All the women I know would do anything to . . .'

At last! Ungern was on his feet and coming towards her. She tried to meet his eyes, blinked, and waited, with her smile fixed on her lips, as though it did not belong to

her But nothing happened Raising her eyes, she found Ungern right beside her, staring at her as though she were a curiosity at her short nose, her schoolgirl's complexion, her parted, painted lips

Ungern's voice rang out, harsher than ever

'Orderly! Have this woman taken away and whipped! D'you hear me?'

Madame Golubev was struck dumb She wanted to stop smiling, but she couldn't Outside the tent, being dragged away by two Cossacks, she was still smiling, and it was with the same smile that she heard Ungern's voice behind her

'I'm a gentleman, am I? Well, if she's wearing drawers, let her keep them on The whore, the whore, the whore!'

The silk resisted in places where the skin had split and the blood-stained stuff stuck to the wounds

A detachment of Tibetans came to join Ungern's division They were tall fellows, bristling with weapons, solemn and child-like They camped apart from the others, and ate their food out of skulls mounted with gold and silver The detachment was commanded by a Buriat named Tubanov

This braggart, bawling man had been educated in the primary school at Verkh-Udinsk Normally he would have become a courtroom usher or a grocer's assistant Nobody ever learnt what chance of civil war had turned him into a Tibetan military leader

In the evening, at mess-time, the Russian officers gathered round the Tibetans' bivouac, like visitors in front of a cage of wild beasts, and exchanged ponderous jokes about the coming renewal of the stock of skulls

'The Dalai Lama is a charming man,' Tubanov told them obligingly 'Between ourselves, Dalai Lama means "Lama of the ocean" '

Nobody knew whether he was talking seriously, but he seemed to be

Madame Golubev had been sent to the baggage-train. Her husband did not accompany her. The Baron had pressed him into service, and the Counsellor of State, with his glasses crooked, was to be seen limping for hours as he drilled.

The New Year was approaching, Semionov showed no further sign of life.

One day a Japanese merchant with a soldierly look about him came to see Ungern. He arrived at nightfall, and shut himself up with the Baron and Captain Sudzuki. That night Makeev, who had been promoted to aide-de-camp, stood sentry outside Ungern's tent. He could see his breath going up in little white clouds in the moonlight. Subdued voices reached his ears from inside the tent, but the speakers were talking a language unknown to him.

It was dawn when the visitor left. On the threshold of the tent, he stopped and said to the Baron, in English:

'You may be sure I'll tell His Excellency everything. Good-bye and good luck.'

He made his way out of the camp. Half a mile or so away, beside a fire hidden in the rocks, two other merchants awaited him. When they saw their companion coming back, they stood at attention.

In the baggage-train word went round that Madame Golubev slept in Chernov's tent.

Big snowflakes were carpeting the frozen surface of the Kerulen. The wind whirled them over the camp, drove them in the soldiers' eyes, and powdered the tents and the horses' manes with them. On the ground they formed a white, wind-swept crust, which the emaciated beasts broke with their hooves in search of a few blades of grass.

Ungern had gone away. His officers, with time hanging heavy on their hands, played cards, talked women, and handed out punishments to the soldiers. Every morning Rezhukhin hurried through current business in order to return to the game of patience he had been playing the

night before. Burdukovski came and planted himself beside him

He never took his eyes off the general's big, red hands, which rested carefully on the cards, went up in the air again, hung there barely quivering, and finally dropped on a queen or a ten. Sometimes Burdukovski coughed, as though he were on the point of saying something. Rezukhin raised his head, ready to argue against any advice he might get, but the little officer never said anything. The general plunged back into his plans, with a pained expression. His game always missed coming out by a card or two.

Once he went so far as to give Burdukovski a withering look, and demanded

'Well, what would you have done in my place?'

Burdukovski stammered something unintelligible. Finally it dawned on the general that he knew nothing whatever about patience.

Sudzuki rarely left his tent. He was to be seen only in the morning, looking very slim and wiry in a sweater and flannel shorts, doing Swedish drill. Every two minutes he stopped to do deep breathing in the cold air. The Russian officers, vaguely annoyed by the contempt for them which this daily exhibition seemed to imply—the captain's shorts, in particular, served to exasperate them—made fun of the Jap. Only Laurenz felt drawn towards this silent man, who, like himself, shaved every day.

Zabiakin, who had never forgotten or forgiven his fifty lashes, reported to Rezukhin that Chernov had had two Cossacks attached to the baggage-train shot.

A Mongol came into camp on horseback. His prince's wife was expecting a child, and the lamas had foretold that she would have a long labour. They prescribed lump sugar, mercury, jumper, coarse salt, and sable-flesh. The prince had everything else that was required, but he was short of sugar.

Abandoning his Tibetans, Tubanov paid visits to the Russian officers. He wanted to talk to them about his schooldays, but, when he groped back into his childhood, all he could remember was bits of grammar.

'A one-year-old horse is called "*unaga*" in Mongol,' he told them. 'Between ourselves, if it is two years old it is called "*daga*", if it is three years old, "*sudelen*", and if it is four years old, "*hudzalan*".'

It was still impossible to tell whether he was talking seriously.

Zabiakin went all round the camp telling everybody that Chernov had had the two Cossacks shot in consequence of a complaint by Madame Golubev. He gave definite details about the nature of her complaint which made the other officers' mouths water and condemned them to a wildly restless night.

Chernov was summoned to headquarters, where Rezuikhin questioned him, Ungern was still away. He had been seen in the neighbourhood in the company of a Buriat sorcerer.

Rezuikhin was sitting beside a cask, with his cards spread out on the top of it. He hesitated. Should he reprimand Chernov and send him back to the baggage-train? Or should he have him shot on the spot? He stared at the lieutenant's beard, which had recovered all its former glory, and decided on a compromise.

'Go and wait out on the ice on the river,' he said. 'His Excellency will deal with you when he comes back.'

Chernov took himself off under the pine-trees. He walked up and down the frozen surface of the Kerulen, brooding. Now and again he stopped and clapped his hands, as though he were applauding the wintry green and white setting. He was really trying to keep himself warm. Ungern did not come back.

Zabiakin presented himself before Rezuikhin, and offered to go and ask the Baron what was to be done with Chernov.

‘What’s the hurry?’ said the general. He was on the point of remembering that Zabiakin had a grudge against Chernov, but he was absorbed in his cards. ‘All right,’ he conceded, ‘you can go.’

A few hours later Zabiakin was back. The general was still sitting in the same place, with Burdukovski beside him. Zabiakin handed him a sheet of paper folded in four.

‘The Baron didn’t say anything to me,’ he remarked.

He must be lying, Rezuikhin reflected vaguely. He abandoned his game, and read the words scribbled by Ungern: ‘Whip Chernov, and then burn him alive.’

Rezuikhin lowered his eyes, studied the arrangement of his cards, and then looked round him. Zabiakin was gazing at the top of a nearby tree. Burdukovski had assumed the worried air of a man who is always late. The general waited a moment or two, turned over a king, and addressed him.

‘Burdukovski!’

He was on the point of asking ‘What would you do in my place?’ But it wasn’t a question of cards now. The general handed Burdukovski Ungern’s order.

‘Arrest Chernov, and give him two hundred lashes. Read that, and make arrangements accordingly.’

Burdukovski looked like a man who has hurried for a train at the last moment and then realized that he has left his suitcase behind.

‘I can’t read, General,’ he said.

Zabiakin came forward, smiling helpfully.

‘You are to . . .’ The general moved three small diamonds, and studied the game again. ‘The Baron has ordered him to be burned,’ he blurted out, without looking at the two officers.

Burdukovski hurried away. Feeling relieved, Rezuikhin moved another small diamond. The game looked promising. The general was superstitious. The knowledge that

Burdukovski was watching his hands had cramped his style these last few days

Cossacks heaped armfuls of wood at the foot of an oak, and a corporal drenched it with Chinese vodka

The average man does not survive two hundred lashes with a bamboo, above all when they are administered in the Mongol way, which strips the flesh from the bones Perhaps Rezukhin had confusedly counted on this when he ordered two hundred lashes But Chernov survived the lashing He would probably have died within the next day or two—if he had been given time

Night had fallen The division was massed round the oak Burdukovski made his appearance, leading Chernov at the end of a rope Chernov could scarcely walk A trickle of blood flowed from his mouth and clotted in his beard

From the opposite side rang out a heavy tramp The Tibetan detachment were attending the show invented by the White men

In the silence of the night, Tubanov's voice made itself heard

"When Zotin-Noyon shammed dead, his nephew Netay-Sara said to his companion "Let us burn him We must not expose the Great Khan's remains to derision" They gathered dry grass and wood, made a pyre, and threw the body into the flames ."

Under the tree, Burdukovski was tying Chernov up

"Zotin-Noyon came to life again "It is not fitting," said his nephew, "that the Great Khan should come to life again after his death " "But I am alive," replied Zotin-Noyon "It is not fitting that, after being dead, the Great Khan should speak again " "But I was only joking " "It is not fitting that the Great Khan should joke " "

Burdukovski passed the rope under Chernov's armpits, and pitched the end of it to the men who had climbed up into the oak

'Pull!' he shouted

'Between ourselves,' Tubanov wound up, 'they burned the Great Khan'

Torches, flaring in the dark, lighting up faces fitfully and setting shoulder-straps sparkling, were plunged into the heap of wood. At once will-o'-the-wisps started gliding over the surface of the pyre, as though an adroit salesman had unrolled, all at once, a piece of velvet, blue and transparent. A strong smell of alcohol filled the air.

'Vodka,' said Zabiakin, with the air of a connoisseur, 'Chinese vodka'

The wood caught fire underneath. Chips blazed as it did so, crackling merrily. Then, all at once, orange flames leapt up from the bottom of the pyre and stood straight in the still air, casting tawny splashes on the trunk of the oak. The division looked on.

The fire rose up, swathed in smoke. Suddenly, caressingly, it stroked the soles of Chernov's feet.

The oak was thirty times older than the men round it. It had sheltered generations of birds in its branches, and between its roots, lineages of rabbits. It was familiar with cold and heat, with the courses of subterranean streams and the paths of the clouds, with winds from all quarters, with storms of all kinds. It had seen squirrels born and stags mate. In a thousand years it had learned many things about the nature of beasts, but it still had much to learn.

The Tibetans were the first to go. Then the soldiers started dispersing. The pyre furrowed with light and shade the gnarled bark of the oak and the man up there. He did not utter a sound.

General Rezhukhin watched the flames climb along the legs of the hanging man. The skin of his feet blackened and shrivelled. His ankles slimmed, and two streams of liquid sizzled as they dropped into the fire.

'Fat,' said the general to himself, and he felt like going

away too. He looked round him. All the men had gone. Only a little group of officers remained. Rezhukhin caught sight of Zabiakin, looking on jeeringly, and Burdukovski, with his arms lax, his mouth half-open, and his eyes starting out of his head. Beside them stood a dog, lured out of the dark by the fire.

Chernov was still alive. His eyes remained open. His clothes caught fire. Then, at last, he spoke.

'Zabiakin,' he said, 'I'll come back from Hell for you. I'll raise a squadron there that will make the Baron himself tremble.'

Chernov's head fell on his breast, and he did not move again. He hung there, naked, flaming, standing in a blaze, and his beard caught fire.

'A pity his whore isn't here to see him,' sneered Zabiakin, but his voice was unsteady.

Chernov's legs fell off. A carbonized cripple, he tainted the air for a few moments more. Then the rope gave way, and upwards of a hundred pounds of calcined carbon, chalk, and potassium dropped into the pyre.

To celebrate the New Year, the Baron allowed the men to get drunk. Even the sentries were reeling. That night it would have been easy to take possession of the camp.

Reeling round the camp-fires, Russian and Mongols intermingled, singing, shouting, engaging in sudden arguments which broke off in the middle. Tethered at a distance, the horses slept, dreaming vague dreams of pasture.

In his tent, Makeev was talking excitedly to a group of officers.

'And he got it into his head that the Golubev woman had made Chernov kill the two Cossacks. He sent for her and her husband, and ordered that whippersnapper Golubev to give his wife fifty lashes with a bamboo. Golubev started stammering something. The Baron turned

to me "Stay with them," he said, "and if he doesn't hit hard enough, hang the two of them" We went out, and what do you think Golubev said to me? "Captain, I beg of you to give me your revolver and let me blow my brains out" "Not likely," I told him "Do you want the Baron to hang me too?" He said nothing more, and everything went off according to plan Let me tell you that Golubev did his job with a heavy hand I really wondered whether he didn't like it I stayed till the end

'You've all the luck,' interjected somebody

'and then I went and reported to the Baron "All right," he said "Now send her out on the ice She'll want a cooling" To tell you the truth, I didn't fancy it After all, she's a lady—a real lady I went up to her and said "You must forgive me, Madame, but I can't help it The Baron orders you to go out on the ice" She walked down to the river, without saying a word When she got to the middle of it, she fell down I tried to help her up "Pull yourself together, Madame," I said "You'll freeze to death" But there was nothing doing She simply lay there I went back to the Baron, and he bawled at me "Tell her that, if she doesn't get up, she shall have another twenty-five lashes" I did as he said She got up and started walking up and down For my part, I went back to the bank and watched her An hour passed All at once, I heard the Baron's voice "Makeev!" "Your Excellency?" "Well, is she still walking about?" "Yes, Your Excellency" The night went on I was wondering what I ought to do, when the Baron summoned me again "Is she still walking about?" "Yes, Your Excellency" "Well, may the devil fly away with her! Tell her to collect some wood and make a fire for herself" I did so, and went to bed'

A bottle of brandy made the round of the mugs The officers thought about the woman alone in the dark

'If I'd been in command,' said Laurenz pensively,

'I'd have found another kind of punishment What's the woman's name?'

'No idea'

'Let's call her Anne,' suggested Lieutenant Issak 'It's a nice name, Anne'

'Gentlemen,' shouted Zabiakin—his voice filled the whole tent—'I give you the toast of Anne!'

'What an ass you are!' exclaimed Issak, but he drank the toast like the rest

The hoot of a horned owl split the night, and, almost at the same moment, a Mongol song rang out, monotonous, melancholy

'Alas that his iron quiver
Lies lost in the forest!
Alas that his poor little body
Lies dead in a foreign land!'

'I wonder,' said Makeev, as though he were talking to himself 'A man's a funny kind of thing, isn't he? Where does a man really begin, and where does he end?'

He was pretty drunk, and he had some trouble in expressing himself

'Take an example,' he went on, with an effort 'Take a one-armed man He's lost an arm, but he's still a man, isn't he?'

Makeev seemed quite excited about it, and Laurenz agreed, in a soothing tone of voice

'Of course he's a man'

Sang the Mongol,

'Tell her his black iron quiver,
Lies lost amid the rocks
Tell her his body that loved
Lies slain by his enemies'

'Take a cripple,' pursued Makeev, struggling desper-

ately with his words, which fell to pieces in his mouth
'He's lost both his legs, but he's still a man, isn't he?'

The shade of Chernov hovered in the tent Issak gave vent to a dull groan

'Shut up, you fool!' shouted Makeev For a moment or two, he was quite clear-headed again 'And suppose you deprive a man of both his arms and his legs—there were cases like that during the war—what have you got left? You've still got a man, haven't you? That's just what I'm driving at Arms and legs aren't what counts So I asked you,' he bellowed, with another access of energy, 'what is it that counts? What is it that counts, when you can take a man all to bits take off his shoulder, or take out his ribs, as you do with sick people—you know, tubercular cases My God, will you tell me where a man ends?'

'You'd better ask Burdukovski,' growled Zabiakin, feeling vaguely upset, 'or the Baron himself'

Makeev scrambled to his feet and rushed out of the tent, as though he were going straight to Ungern

But instead he stayed just outside the tent, chewing at his slack, moist lips Vague thoughts came unravelled in his mind You take a man, and you cut off his head What have you got left? Nothing Makeev felt triumphant But at once muddled memories of childhood assailed him There have been such things as headless horsemen I know there were It was in a book by an English scientist His mind clouded again

The Mongol was still singing

'Say that his fine eyes,
With all their tears, are closed
Say that his long black hair,
With all its braids, lies still
Speak to my father and say
That I have fifteen wounds
Speak to my mother and say
That they cut out my tripes'

It was a fine night It was cold The year 1921 had begun

A few days later, Ungern gave orders to strike camp
His division marched on Urga

FOR the second time the Baron was about to launch his men against the Mongolian capital. He was playing all his trumps. By dint of flattery, he had managed to pacify Chang Tso-lin, and, if the marshal should suddenly change his mind, the Japanese would take charge of bringing him to reason.

The Chinese had forfeited their last chances by arresting the Hutukhtu a few weeks earlier. The Living Buddha was a prisoner in his palace in Urga, and even his life was not safe. Not all the blood of the Chinese garrison would suffice to wash away that insult.

Spare horses followed Ungern's regiments. His men's Japanese cloth uniforms fitted without a fold, and his Italian machine-guns were burnished till they looked brand-new. The snow barely crunched under the horses' hooves.

Urga was doomed. If it resisted bombardment, it would fall by famine. It was only a question of time. But Ungern hoped the Chinese would not murder the Hutukhtu at the last moment. The election of another Living Buddha would last for months and months, the princelings Ungern had laboriously won over to his side would scatter in search of fresh pasture for their flocks and herds, and he would have to begin all over again.

The column was approaching Urga when Tubanov rode up to Ungern.

'*Kutun-baina*?' he said cheerfully, and proceeded to translate. 'Isn't it cold? I'd like to have a word with you about my lamas.'

‘What lamas do you mean?’

‘I’ve got some Tangut lamas with my squadron I picked them up on their way back from Lhasa In Tibet, you know’ Tubanov waved his hand vaguely towards the horizon ‘Between ourselves,’ he went on, ‘they’re regular wizards They can bump a man off at a distance better than a machine-gun, and they can foretell the future from now till the end of the world, and even after’

Ungern said nothing Tubanov thought better of it

‘It really doesn’t matter,’ he said

‘Yes, it matters a lot’ The Baron stared at him, very much interested ‘Well, go on! What were you going to say? What do they want, these lamas of yours?’

The lamas insisted upon their ritual They didn’t approve of starting a battle without consulting the oracles

‘That’s a good one, isn’t it?’ said Tubanov He and the Baron had ridden aside from the track They watched the field-guns going past, drawn by little Mongol horses which wouldn’t wear shoes

‘They’re quite right,’ replied Ungern A flood of memories overwhelmed him He stroked his mare’s flanks nervously with his whip It was unpardonable of him He had betrayed tradition But his luck held Tradition had come to meet him of its own accord

‘Division, halt!’ he shouted

The command re-echoed along the column Gunners hauled at traces, wheels sank in the snow, and the column came to a standstill Rezukhin galloped up to the Baron

‘We’re halting, General,’ said the Baron ‘Pitch camp’

Tubanov stared at the men dismounting, the rifles being piled, the machine-guns which stood out against the snow, as clearly as dead branches

‘Between ourselves’ he began He did not finish his sentence

The lamas had donned their ceremonial costumes They formed a circle round a black goat, which was pinioned

to the ground With gentle, wondering eyes, the beast followed the proceedings of these men who uttered shrill cries and blew trumpets

'When the goat's heart stops beating,' Tubanov explained, 'we can march on Urga'

Night had fallen Fires lit up the camp The Tanguts went on revolving round their prey, and their guttural cries mingled with the blaring of their conches

Tubanov, quite in his element, acted as showman to the officers who were attracted by the spectacle

'What are they saying?' asked Zabiakin, half-contemptuous, half-fearful

Tubanov translated

'Destroyer of the yellow snakes, disperser of the yellow clouds, pacifier of the yellow winds'

In the morning the goat was still alive Its moist eyes registered suffering The animal was hungry, cold, and frightened The lamas brought along little red drums, on which interlaced dragons were painted, and their raucous rolls filled the air over the camp

In the evening of the second day, Ungern made his way to the Tibetans' bivouac He seemed calm, and his features registered respectful interest

'And suppose the lamas advise you not to attack Urga?' asked a voice behind him 'Are you going to obey the goat's heart, General?'

Sudzuki's face was expressionless, but his intonation was sarcastic

Ungern was annoyed

'Have you read Marco Polo, Captain?' he retorted 'Do you remember his description of the battle which Kubilai fought against Nayan?'

'I must confess, Baron'

'Listen to this, Sudzuki!' Ungern's eyes shone as he quoted '“He ordered his astrologers to see whether he would win the battle and overcome his enemies The

astrologers investigated in accordance with their art, and told him to go forward boldly, for he would win and achieve victory and honour, whereat he was much pleased ” ’

‘That’s just legend, Baron,’ said Sudzuki, in a bored tone of voice

‘It’s tradition, Captain ’

‘It’s just legend,’ repeated Sudzuki ‘In real life, things were quite different Do you remember the time when the Khan Hulagu decided to take Bagdad? His astrologer said to him “If you attack the Abbasids, your men and your horses will perish, there will be neither sun in the sky nor rain from heaven, the soil will become sterile, and you yourself will die within a year” The astrologer was a partisan of the Abbasids, and wanted to save their city The khan sent for another astrologer, belonging to the sect of Ali, and this one foretold victory to him Hulagu took Bagdad, and so proved that all the Mongols needed was a favourable omen ’

The goat lowed feebly

‘The Tangut lamas are ignorant impostors,’ Sudzuki went on ‘You have your guns and your machine-guns, Baron So why this halt?’

‘The omen will be favourable,’ replied Ungern

He went on watching the lamas, in silence Sudzuki strolled away A little later the Baron caught sight of him walking up and down with Laurenz Their smart uniforms and their caps cocked jauntily over their sleek hair made them look rather alike

The dawn of the third day found the goat still alive Never had so many men more ardently desired the death of an animal They hated it, this stupid beast that refused to die

‘Why not slit its throat,’ sneered Zabiakin, ‘and let’s have a good dinner of it ’

The soldiers argued among themselves

'There's a silly religion for you!' said a bearded Cossack to his neighbour, a little Mongol horseman 'They're regular savages Do you know how they treat the sick?' he asked the men sitting round the fire, in a serious tone of voice 'First they start saying prayers That's all right Then they give medicine to drive the evil spirit out of the patient's body I've nothing to say against that either But then they offer clothes and a horse to the evil spirit to induce him to go away Clothes and a horse—just imagine it! Do you believe in that?' he asked the Mongol

A burst of laughter greeted his words

'Do you believe that our lives belong to Buddha?' asked the nomad

'Buddha or maybe not Buddha,' said the Cossack 'Anyhow, go on'

'And you believe, don't you, that an evil spirit may hide in a man's body and that he can be driven out? Then why shouldn't you believe that he should want clothes and a horse with which to go away?'

At a loss, the Cossack groped for an argument

'Jesus Christ' he began He could see the difference all right, but he couldn't find words to express it

'It doesn't matter, one way or the other,' declared a mocking voice from the other side of the fire, and a long, hard face, which looked more like that of an artisan than a soldier, emerged out of the darkness 'It's all up with the goat, anyway They don't give it anything to eat, so it's got to end by dying'

The third day was drawing to a close when the lamas came and told Ungern that the goat's heart had stopped beating, and that he would take Urga in three days

While the commissariat was issuing rations of hard tack and bully beef to the men, Ungern assembled his officers A smile disclosed his decayed teeth, but his eyes looked be-

yond them In a curt voice, which admitted no reply, he gave his orders

The Buriat brigade was to cut the roads to Kobdo and Kiakhtha, to the east of Urga, Zabiakin, at the head of a detachment of Cossacks, was to make his way to the north of the town and hold himself ready to create a diversion The bulk of the forces, commanded by Rezhukhin, would open the attack to the east and south-east, along the Kalgan road The general would be supported by all the artillery The Baron himself would take up position to the south, on the summit of the Bogdo-Ula range He would keep the Mongol regiment with him

Ungern broke off in the middle of a sentence The officers waited Their leader stared at them questioningly 'That's all,' he said 'What are you waiting for?'

The officers stood up

'By the way,' added Ungern carelessly, 'it goes without saying that anybody who lights a cigarette during the march will be executed'

The division got on the march at nightfall Brief commands rang out, and silently, one after the other, squadrons detached themselves from the column and vanished into the dark A slight fall of snow covered the marks of the horses' hooves Nothing was to be heard except, here and there, a creak of wheels or the jolting of an ammunition-wagon

Sudzuki reined in his horse alongside Ungern

'Urga,' he said, pointing to the horizon

Through the scudding clouds, the moon cast pale patches on the surrounding heights Beyond the serried range of the Bogdo-Ula, the ice on the Tola showed blue On the opposite bank rose the Hutukhtu's palace To the right lay Maimacheng In the background Urga was plunged in darkness Farther away to the left curved the roofs of the monastery of Gandon There was not a sound, not a light The town slept

The Mongol regiment set off along the path which led to the summit of the Bogdo-Ula

The sacred range of mountains was alive with nocturnal life. For the past two hundred years its slopes had been immune from the sportsman's gun and the wood-cutter's axe. Its gorges lay open only for meditation. The Living Buddha, who abandoned his successive remains at death and reincarnated himself in the body of a newborn baby, had entrusted the fate of the mountains to Nature, and Nature had made a good job of it.

The branches of the twice-centenarian trees bowed beneath the burden of birds' nests. Out of the tumbled rocks burst springs whose flow was turned out of its course by the frost. Paths wound their way round tree-trunks and through meadows. Under the snow, leaves and herbs and dead branches were free to rot, turn into humus, and reincarnate themselves, thousands of years later, in the shape of coal. Nocturnal birds, plump and heavy, stirred the still air in their flight.

'In the summer,' said Sudzuki, 'this forest is full of the hum of insects. The song of the springs makes the round of the rocks, and you can't tell where the flowers end and the butterflies begin.'

Roes came out of the dark with slow, graceful steps and stared lazily at this herd of men. They had never seen so many men before, or men in such a hurry. They barely stood aside as the men went by, and their moist, meditative eyes followed after them.

The Mongol regiment reached the summit of the range in the middle of the night.

The radio-telegraphist in Urga was awakened just before dawn. Pekin wanted him. He was a placid, unimaginative man, who lived for his instruments. He seemed to have no friends, and took no interest in women.

Still half-asleep, he donned his head-phones. Pekin

wanted to know whether it was true that a force of unknown origin was attacking Urga. If so, had the commander of the garrison taken the necessary defensive measures?

The telegraphist smiled. From where he sat, he could see in the distance part of the town and the stretches of snow around it. Everything was quiet. The temple bells had not yet called the lamas to prayer, and the summit of the Bogdo-Ula was swathed in the bluish haze which preceded daybreak.

The operator smiled again. Really, these people in Peking were absurdly nervous. It wasn't worth while waking him up for a yarn like that. He had another look. There was nothing to be seen. He took off his headphones and stretched himself.

The aide-de-camp to General Chu Chi-siang, commanding the Chinese garrison in Urga, came in without knocking. He went over to the window, and had a long look at the horizon. The operator could see only the back of him. The officer shrugged his shoulders. Then, without turning round, he said:

'Get into touch with Peking. Somebody or other has just spirited the Hutukhtu away.'

Tubanov was so proud of himself he could scarcely breathe. Whenever he moved, he felt as though he were displacing enormous masses of air. If he raised his arm, his outstretched forefinger seemed to discharge a deadly ray which annihilated everything in its path. He amused himself by running his finger in front of him, decapitating trees and splitting rocks. 'Steady now,' he said to himself, 'mustn't annihilate my own men. I may want them again.'

His Tibetans had dismounted and formed a close circle round the lamas. The fight had lasted less than half an hour. They had ridden up to the palace, cut down the sleeping sentries, made their way into the Living Buddha's

quarters, and returned to the left bank of the Tola at a gallop, bringing their sacred prisoner with them

'A statue of me,' Tubanov said to himself, 'an equestrian statue, of course' He hesitated for a moment Should it be in Verknı-Udınsk or in Urga? Or why not in Lhasa? Yes, a bronze statue in Lhasa, and commemorative tablets elsewhere

Dispatch-riders reached Ungern one after the other Rezhukhin had cut the road to Kalgan To the north-east the Buriat squadrons had reached the road to Kiakhta All the surrounding heights were occupied When night fell, Ungern's Asiatic division formed a great horse-shoe round the town

Sudzuki rode up to the Baron

'The enemy number five thousand men,' he said, 'fifteen hundred of them mounted'

'We shall attack at dawn,' replied Ungern

The telegraph operator sat at his apparatus He had only to stretch out his hand, and Kalgan, Hankow, Peking would hasten to answer his call But, to do that, he would have had to feel isolated He would have needed some imagination

He gazed at a window placidly The night stuck to the panes In Shanghai people would be dancing He must lay in another supply of tobacco to-morrow In Tokio the stock market was quiet after a day of upward trends The door of the room gave off a smell of fresh paint

A fire sprang to life on the horizon The operator got up and went to the window At first he could see nothing but his own reflection He must have been mistaken Then, level with his left temple, he saw a red flame flickering He rubbed his eyes Two luminous dots made their appearance level with his lips The operator flattened his nose against the window

By now a whole swarm of fires were piercing the dark
They were too low down and too red to be stars Flames
rose up Some of them were quite close, on the hill
opposite his office

The operator went back to his seat Through every win-
dow in the room the horizon bristled with braziers They
ran from summit to summit, slid down slopes and climbed
up the other side, curved away east and west Over the
flames the operator called Peking

‘What’s the Hutukhtu doing, Captain?’

Ungern was sitting on a rug at a wood fire

Sudzuki looked at him

‘He’s asleep, I suppose,’ he said

‘I want to see him,’ Ungern went on ‘But not yet Not
till we’ve taken Uрга You can introduce me to him in
his palace’

‘All right’

‘Are you sleepy, Captain?’

‘No’ Sudzuki’s voice registered some surprise ‘Why?’

‘I thought you might be You’re very silent to-
night’

Ungern threw some twigs on the fire

‘Do you know Sato?’ he asked

‘Who?’

‘Sato He’s a Mongol His real name is Japaranov, I
believe He acted as our guide’

‘Oh, did he?’

‘Yes He’s a funny fellow He studied in Petersburg
I doubt whether he was ever in Mongolia before What
about you?’

‘Oh, yes, I know the country’

There was a silence

‘Does it surprise you,’ Sudzuki went on, ‘that Sato
should feel himself to be a Mongol without ever having
lived in his country?’ I myself

‘Yes?’

‘I studied in England, and I’ve travelled a good deal since’

‘Well?’

‘I feel as though I’d never left Japan I’m there at this moment You feel yourself to be very much a Russian, don’t you?’

The Baron hesitated before he replied

‘No, I hate them’

‘Whom—the Russians?’

‘I hate everybody’

There was another silence

‘So you know Sato?’ said Ungern

‘Who’s Sato?’ replied Sudzuki

A roe came out of the forest, approached the brazier, and sniffed the air curiously

‘The animals in the Bogdo-Ula have never seen fire,’ remarked Sudzuki

‘Sato told me one day that the Hutukhtu was very fond of animals,’ said Ungern

‘That’s quite true He’s got a whole menagerie’

‘For foretelling the future?’

‘No, he’s just got it He likes looking at the animals’

‘Does he know why we’re here?’

‘Yes,’ said Sudzuki ‘Or maybe no In any case, it doesn’t make any difference’

It was six o’clock in the morning when the first shots rang out to the north of the town Zabiakin was opening the attack, in accordance with his orders Promptly the artillery came into action to the south-east With his plump body comfortably ensconced on an old gelding, which was fat and placid, General Rezukhin directed operations

The Chinese had entrenched the left bank of the Tola, but, taken by surprise by the attack, they gave way and

'General Chu Chi-siang can't come He's directing operations'

'Then ask for the general's aide-de-camp'

In the renewed silence, one of the officers let his head drop on his chest

'The general's aide-de-camp is with the general'

'Then ask for any superior officer'

The other officer stood up, made a few hesitating, sketchy steps up and down the room, and slumped into his chair again

'All the officers are in the front line'

The civilian turned towards his companions, but they were both asleep At this his bad temper, fed by lack of sleep, flared out

'Tell that stinking Tatar to tell you what's happening!' he shouted

'He says he'll try,' replied the telegraphist, keeping on the safe side 'He says he's only a civilian'

The telegraphist pulled himself up, bit his tongue, and, with neck outstretched, turned his head from side to side He would give anything—even, if necessary, become a coolie, like his father and grandfather before him—to be able to lie down and sleep In a flat tone of voice, he recited what his colleague in Urga reported

'The fires were burning again all night'

'Speak louder! I can't hear you,' shouted the civilian, and the sound of his voice awakened the two officers

'He says the fires were burning again all night,' repeated the telegraphist 'In the morning unknown forces crossed the Tola They came from the Bogdo-Ula They were on horseback. Then there was firing They went back to the other bank Guns have just started firing on the Kalgan road They're still firing'

'Ask him whether the garrison is well supplied with munitions'

There was another brief silence

'He says he doesn't know The guns are firing all the time He thinks there must be a number of guns'

The two officers had gone to sleep again Nothing disturbed the quiet of the room but the telegraphist's voice

'There is also firing beyond Maimacheng A man on horseback is galloping along the left bank of the Tola He isn't a Chinese'

'All right Ask him whether the enemy have been identified yet And are there many of them?'

Another brief silence

'He doesn't know He says there were about three hundred fires, or five hundred, or perhaps a thousand'

The civilian pondered

'Tell him,' he said, at length, 'to find me an officer immediately and bring him to the instrument By order of the Minister of War'

The reply came back promptly

'He says he'll try He says wait a minute The gun-fire has started again Horsemen are making their way towards the heights on the other side of '

The telegraphist's voice registered hesitation

'What does he say?' shouted the civilian

'He says he can't go on He's got to get away He thinks a a cannon-ball must have fallen in his office'

'Tell him '

But Urga did not answer any more

The second shell wrecked the telegraph instrument The operator bent over it It had been ordered in England, brought to Urga on camel-back, and been cleaned and polished and tested every day In all Mongolia there was no surfaces flatter, no bolts better fitted Now nothing was left of it but a mess of copper and steel There was nothing to be done but apply to the British company which had supplied it There were no spare parts nearer than London

'After all, I'm neutral,' said the operator, aloud

He felt that he badly wanted to speak to somebody. He picked up his bag, and bent over the instrument for the last time. It wasn't worth while trying to do anything with it.

'Stop,' he said, and walked out of his office.

He was a Dane, and he had been sent to Mongolia from London along with the instrument.

As during the preceding nights, Ungern had given orders for fires to be lit on the heights: one fire for every three men. Rifle-men had been dispatched to the north of Maimacheng. They were to open fire at midnight precisely. A regiment was posted on the slopes of the Bogdo-Ula. They were to cross the Tola at a given signal, skirt the Hutukhtu's palace, and attack the town from the south side. The bulk of the troops were massed to the south-east, some three miles from the nearest houses. The braziers were left to burn out by dawn. By that time all would be over.

Ungern tramped up and down in the snow, slashing at the air with his whip. Since the previous day he had been suffering from toothache. His eyes, with their network of red veins, were more deeply sunk in his head than usual.

Everything was going too slowly for his liking. It was all his men's fault: the fault of dispatch-riders who did not press their horses, the fault of officers who were good for nothing but getting drunk and making love. But Laurenz, for that matter, never drank. The Baron raged.

All at once he remembered the telegram he had received from Sudzuki, recommending him to leave Dauria. It had mentioned Sato, and now Sudzuki pretended he had never heard of him.

A horseman coming from the north rode out into the clearing. He saluted and said

'Lieutenant Zabiakin begs to report to Your Excellency that he will have reached the positions assigned to him within the next half-hour'

The Baron's whip lashed man and mount The horse shuddered and sprang aside, but the man did not move a muscle

'Within half an hour,' stormed Ungern, 'within half an hour! Go and tell your lieutenant that he'

He broke off, turned away, and started walking up and down again

Sitting his horse motionless, the soldier glanced round him to make sure nobody was looking, and, with a quick movement, wiped away the blood that was oozing from his cut forehead

Ungern came back to him

'What are you waiting for? Be off with you, you son-of-a-bitch, you brothel brat!'

A clump of dead boughs stuck out of the snow The Baron ground them under his heel

'Captain Sudzuki!' he shouted

'I'm here, Baron,' replied a voice close to him Sudzuki emerged out of the dark

Close-shaven as usual, reflected the Baron, involuntarily He and Laurenz Ungern felt ashamed of his own beard You ought to smarten yourself up His grandmother Wimpffen To Hell with her! Thinking was a piece of cowardice

'It's twenty minutes to eleven,' said Sudzuki

A deep ravine, drowned in dark, lay in front of Rezuken With the ease of long practice, the general made out the time by his watch In six minutes Behind him he could hear the horses breathing It was impossible to see anything, but he could feel their massive presence behind his back He was an old campaigner

'Forward!' he ordered

The order, repeated in low voices, ran along the column. It got on the move.

The depths of the ravine were covered with glazed frost. The unshod Mongol horses made their way along carefully, picking their steps. Now and again you could hear the dull sound of a horse falling. His rider picked himself up, swearing under his breath, and proceeded on foot. Gunners busied themselves silently round restive teams, while the guns' wheels skated over the ice.

Sergeant Ma studied the dark in front of him. His detachment of scouts were under cover at the foot of a hill a few hundred yards from the ravine. Fiery dots marked the line of the horizon. The Chinese were beginning to get used to them. The six men of the detachment were asleep.

The ravine hypnotized the sergeant. No danger could possibly come from that direction. The enemy were massed to the north, beyond the barracks. Still, the sergeant could not bring himself to take his eyes off that patch of dark. He made an effort, and glanced at the distant heights. The flames rose quietly, and their familiar presence soothed him. Those lights reminded him of the feast of Tsongkhava, when, from dusk to dawn, lights burned before the door of devotees of the Yellow faith, from the Hutukhtu's palace to the humblest tent lost in the desert.

But the ravine drew Sergeant Ma's eyes back again. He started. In the depths of that dark pit a broad flood, still darker, seemed to be flowing. He felt like rousing his men. But they would make fun of him. Yet he felt sure his eyes were not deceiving him. This parade of shadows was much more terrifying than the firing and the cavalry charges of the day before.

All at once, from the depths of the ravine, rose a sobbing, wild neighing—the unmistakable neigh of a horse stricken to death.

'Get up!' shouted Sergeant Ma, putting his rifle to his shoulder.

The head of the column had reached the mouth of the ravine when the Chinese scouts fired.

'If anybody fire back, I'll break his neck,' muttered Rezukhin through clenched teeth.

Horses went down, bringing their riders with them. A riderless beast galloped alongside the column. Gun-carriages clattered as they rolled over bodies.

Once the first surprise was over, Rezukhin's men realized that the firing was not intense. Besides, by now the column was past the stretch of glazed frost. The horses trotted briskly at the foot of the hill. The firing died away. The enemy must be on the look-out for the attackers' approach. The leading squadron deployed.

'At the trot, forward!'

The cavalry started up the slope. The hill seemed abandoned. This barren, extinct volcano was void of any ambush. The moon, jostled by clouds, ransacked the smallest folds in the ground, and for a moment, before it disappeared again, shed a milky light on the surrounding plain. There was no sign of the enemy.

The artillery had been left at the foot of the hill. A detachment, labouring, manhandled a mountain-gun to the summit. Soon centaur-like figures stood out round the crater. Then darkness swept men, horses, and landscape away again.

The gun was mounted facing towards Maimacheng. For the second time, Rezukhin looked at his watch. It was two minutes to midnight.

A horseman dashed up the hill, riding hell-for-leather. He reached the crater, turned his head right and left, saw nothing, caught sight of the gun, and shouted:

'Fire!'

Rezukhin recognized Ungern's voice.

The gun was fired, a rocket sizzled through the air; and, almost at the same moment, salvo upon salvo rang out to the north, and shouts, deadened by distance, pierced

the sky on the horizon In Maimacheng lights sprang out in windows

In close ranks, with fixed bayonets, grim-lipped, the men of Ungern's division descended the slope

The battle raged all night long The Chinese had entrenched themselves in Maimacheng, and they put up a stout fight The regiment of Mongol cavalry, which had been held in reserve on the Bogdo-Ula, went forward at the gallop in a straight line, crossed the Tola, and attacked the town from the south side, but they were driven back by machine-gun fire

At dawn the attack was renewed Standing on a height which overlooked Maimacheng, Ungern watched the waves of assault flowing towards the town, and then flowing back again and dying away in the plain His beard had grown a little longer, and his thin, dried-up eyelids were red His unblinking eyes surveyed those cowards down there who were afraid to risk their skins

The Chinese company posted to the north of Maimacheng were the first to give way At the same moment Rezukhin's cavalry broke through the south gate Street fighting followed

Windows spat bullets at the attackers From the roofs, shaken by gun-fire, hand-grenades dropped by the dozen Corpses sprawled against walls, blocked streets, congested courtyards The winding lanes, all stretches of blind walls, limited the field of fire The blaring of conches dominated the din

While the fighting was still going on, Mongols and Cossacks started sacking the shops They shattered shutters They slit the throats of shopkeepers Broken-down doors vomited silks, idols, sacks of tea, and articles of saddlery

The gate of the Commercial Bank yielded to the blows of rifle-butts The offices were empty The Mongols hung

back at the foot of the staircase. Many of them had never set eyes on a staircase before. They went upstairs slowly, suspiciously. There was nobody on the first floor. The clerks had fled, leaving drawers half shut and inkpots wide open. Files of documents were piled up to the ceiling. One of the nomads pulled out a file, and a swarm of papers escaped from it.

In the next room a square piece of furniture attracted the soldiers' attention. It was full of gold ingots. At once there was a rush. The Mongols ransacked the whole building, knocking desks over, dismantling pigeon-holes, pulling down hangings. They stooped down, picked up files by the armful, and flung them out of the windows. Clouds of bills, drafts, and receipts circled in the air. The street looked as though it were making holiday.

These squares of paper, scattered on the ground and over the roofs, were the first things that caught Ungern's eyes when he reached Maimacheng after the Chinese had retreated.

Urga, strictly so called, is about two miles away from Maimacheng. The two towns are linked by a road which passes the Mongolor Company building, which has a dreary look, like barracks in the rain, and then reaches the Russian consulate and other Russian official buildings. The Chinese quarter is at the other end of the town. It is from here that the road to Kiakhta starts.

As the lamaist religion forbids burial of the dead, corpses are carried outside the walls of Urga and laid on the ground, with pillows under their heads and Tibetan prayer-books in their hands. The bodies are covered with coarse blankets, held down by four stones. The town of the dead hems in the town of the living closely. It is peopled by wild black dogs, who feed on the bodies, leaving skeletons, hair, pillows, and prayer-books to the wind and the rain.

Before attacking the garrison of Urga, Zabiakin's force had to fight a battle with these cannibal dogs.

'If you want to see the Hutukhtu,' said Sudzuki, leaning towards Ungern, 'you'll find him in his palace'

'I told you before not until we've taken Urga'

'It's only a matter of hours'

'I'll wait'

Ungern had waited so long that he could afford to wait a little longer

In his camp on the banks of the Kerulen, worried and tortured by hunger, when he sat up till dawn writing obsequious letters to far-off generals gorged with alcohol and foreign money, or in some smoky tent, when he drove a hard bargain with a grasping, suspicious chieftain, how often had he dreamed about the day when, as a victorious general, for the first time since the revolution he would restore to a Sovereign his capital, his country, and his people!

That day had come He held it in his hand, as tightly as he grasped his whip Just a few hours more How slow those men of his were!

Packed into eight automobiles, the Chinese general staff took to flight by the Kiakhta road, abandoning their troops Shots rang out more seldom At four o'clock an orderly came and reported to Ungern that Urga was taken To the north of the town stretched a long column of fugitives

Ungern covered the distance which separated the town from the Hutukhtu's palace all by himself He had contemplated taking an escort with him, but decided against it He dismounted outside a wooden fence, crossed a large courtyard obliquely, and went up the steps of a two-storey house, flanked by a railed-off little garden

Two lamas greeted the Baron at the door He followed them along a narrow passage Along the walls on either

side ran cages, in which little white and grey animals scurried about. Ungern fancied they were guinea-pigs. Through open doors he caught sight of a medley of statuettes, musical instruments, bicycles, mechanical toys, and, above all, birds in cages and clocks of all shapes and tones.

As he went up the staircase behind the silent lamas, Ungern passed his hand across his cheek. He was seized with sudden shyness. In a few moments he was going to be in the presence of a king, a prophet, a god. The thought made the Baron forget his toothache.

On either side of the door stood a stuffed tiger and a stuffed gorilla. Ungern set foot on the threshold uncertainly.

Sudzuki came forward to meet him.

'The Hutukhtu is awaiting you,' he said.

Ungern made no reply. He looked round for the Living Buddha. Sudzuki pulled him by the sleeve.

The Baron saw a man getting on in years, who barely turned towards his visitor. He had a grey, puffy face, with folds encrusted in its flabby flesh. His eyes were hidden behind black glasses. Indolence and luxury had made his slightly open mouth sag.

'Tell His Holiness,' began Ungern—and his voice sounded comically solemn in that room from whose ceiling hung a stuffed crocodile—'that I am gratified to see him, and that I put myself and my men at his disposal.'

Sudzuki translated. Bogdo-Guighen spoke in his turn, in a low, monotonous voice.

'What does he say?' asked the Baron, in a whisper.

Sudzuki looked at Ungern with an amused expression. He paused.

'He says he's glad to see you.'

ANDREI was the same age as the century. So, in 1921, he had just reached his majority. The century had got ahead of him with one revolution, that of 1905, but, since then, Andrei had fully caught up with it. Besides, in Mongolia centuries were inextricably intermingled. The mere opening of a door sometimes sufficed to lead you from the most authentic feudalism to the period of domination by capitalism and trusts.

Andrei was short. He did not need to stoop in order to enter the hut whose position Taijev had so carefully described to him.

A young Mongol rose to meet him. He was obviously frightened. His eyes looked right and left, flickering across the figure of the white man.

‘Dorji?’ said the newcomer, questioningly.

His host replied with a long sentence in Mongol.

‘I don’t understand,’ said the visitor. ‘Comrade Dorji?’ he repeated.

At the word ‘comrade’ the Mongol’s face brightened. But he was still on his guard.

Reassured, the Russian came forward a step or two, and started taking off his gloves.

‘Have you got any goose-grease?’ he asked. ‘Or any other kind of grease?’

He had got his gloves off, and was studying his purple fingers, with their chapped flesh.

‘They hurt like the dickens,’ he said plaintively. Then he added, ‘I have come on behalf of Taijev.’

‘Good day, comrade,’ said Dorji. His mouth opened

comically as he pronounced the Russian words, making them finical and distorted

'Tajiev told me that you spoke Russian,' said Andrei
He examined his hands again

'So you haven't got any grease?' he went on, but he was thinking about something else 'Tajiev should have come himself The trouble is that he's too well known here For my part, I don't even understand Mongol I tried to explain that, but Silly, isn't it?' he wound up, with a child-like smile

'Bad thing, here,' said Dorji

'Obviously, I should have got to Urga much earlier, but I was delayed Difficulties ' He was going to say 'of a practical kind', but he changed his mind 'I had to go out of my way I got here at the same time as the Baron I've been hanging about for five days out there '

He waved his hand vaguely

'Hungry?' asked Dorji

He went and got some food

As he ate, Andrei came to life again He was terribly hungry For three days he had fed on biscuits and snow

'Listen, old fellow,' he said, pulling eagerly at the pipe his host had offered him 'Before anything else, bring me up to date Tajiev and the others have told me a lot of things They've given me statistics—figures, I mean—and all that But that's not enough In the first place, what's happened since Ungern came here?'

'They killed all the Communists—the Russian Communists' Dorji smiled 'The next day they killed all the Jews They killed the Chinese In Maimacheng they hanged some Mongols They are strong There is nothing to be done '

'Come, come!' Andrei pretended to be surprised

'There are twenty-three of us,' Dorji went on, doggedly.
'Only twenty-three '

'You, and who else?'

'Bodo, Choi-Balsan, Suki-Bator Suki-Bator used to be
a

Dorji groped for a word

'He made a newspaper'

'You mean he wrote for one?'

'No He told me He picked up pieces of lead all day
in a big building They put a sheet of paper on top of
them, and there was a newspaper You know anything
like that?'

'Oh, you mean he was a printer'

'Printer' Dorji smiled, and repeated this new word
'Printer'

'That's right And who else?'

'Danzan'

'And what does he do?'

'Before, he was lama'

'I know, Tajiev told me about them He said the lamas
made up twenty-two per cent of the population Is that
true?'

'I don't understand'

'Well, are there many lamas?'

'Yes My brother is lama'

'And how many are there in your family?'

'He, I, and two sisters'

'So you see, when I said twenty-two per cent'
Andrei smiled 'I'll explain that to you some other time
You must arrange a meeting with the comrades for me
As soon as possible' He yawned 'How does one say
"comrade" in Mongol?'

'*Neukeur*'

'*Neukeur* I see By the way, don't tell them I'm here
One never knows I'll stay the night with you After that,
we'll see'

Andrei was sleepy, and his hands pained him He lay
down on the ground, on his back, rested his hands on his
thighs, and spread out his fingers Had he forgotten any-

thing? Taijev Something was hurting him something hard, right in the small of his back His revolver He moved it round, and sank into a warm drowse

'Dorji,' he asked, 'is your brother one of us?' But he fell asleep without waiting for the answer

The meeting was held two days later It took that time to inform everybody and find a safe place for it Dorji had to be very careful As for Andrei, he dare not show himself anywhere

As yet Ungern's men paid no attention to the Mongols, and they enjoyed comparative safety They could move about freely and communicate among themselves It was decided to meet in a hut in Maimacheng near Dorji's Everybody was summoned early in the afternoon It would not do to meet at night, as that might arouse suspicion Andrei went there the day before, late in the evening He was lucky enough not to meet anybody

The Mongols arrived one after the other, at short intervals, greeted the Russian *neukeur*, and squatted down on the floor When there were twenty-two of them, Dorji, who had been keeping watch outside, came in too

Andrei was used to meetings He had behind him four years of secret rendezvous and assemblies under Kolchak Still, he was affected by the atmosphere of this meeting Ungern had just taken possession of Urga There were corpses in the streets Death to the Communist dogs, and all that sort of thing, Andrei said to himself Besides, this hut was so gloomy, these men were so serious

There was a fellow there, a stripling—at first, indeed, Andrei had taken him for a girl—who smiled at him every time their eyes met Andrei tried to look older than he was—I am entrusted with a responsible mission, he kept on saying to himself—but every time he caught that young Mongol smiling, he felt upset The smile implied such trust in him

Later on, when he tried to recollect this meeting, he realized that a good deal had escaped him. Dorji translated. Most of the Mongols did not know Russian, and Andrei knew only one word of Mongol '*neukeur*'

Before he left Kiakhta, the Party had communicated to him the Mongolian budget for 1917-18. He had forgotten the exact figures, but he remembered that the upkeep of the Hutukhtu, the princes, and the army made up two-thirds of it. The national debt amounted to about one thousand *taels* per dwelling-tent. In other words, the average value of the property possessed by a Mongol family. That means, reflected Andrei, that to extinguish the debt the whole of Mongolia would have to be sold up. He found it hard to imagine such poverty: an age-old, time-honoured, sacrosanct poverty.

An old man spoke first.

'At the bottom,' he said, 'there are the *arats*. Above them are the lamas. Then come the nobles. Then come the princes. Then comes the Hutukhtu. How many years of galloping would it take to go from the *arat* to the Hutukhtu?'

Sukhi-Bator, the ex-printer, spoke in his turn.

'To-day,' he said, 'above the Hutukhtu is Ungern.'

Andrei added his contribution.

'And above Ungern is Japan.'

Dorji translated what he had said. The Mongols stared at him blankly. Andrei told them what he knew about the Baron's relations with the Japanese General Staff. He himself was not very well informed.

'But Ungern set the Hutukhtu free,' said the old man who had already spoken.

Sukhi-Bator started talking very quickly. He seemed to Andrei to be angry.

'He says that the Hutukhtu is a debauchée,' Dorji explained. 'He is married. His wife decides everything. A Hutukhtu has no right to marry. Sukhi-Bator says that Narbanchi-Guiguen is reincarnated in the Hutukhtu.'

Later Andrei heard the story of Narbanchi-Guiguen. He was the abbot of a monastery near Uliassutai, and spent his time drinking and practising with a carbine on passers-by. One day he arrived in Uliassutai in a carriage drawn by five naked prostitutes. Finally he carried off the daughter of the Chinese governor, and was poisoned by his lamas.

Another Mongol spoke after Sukhi-Bator. He had a gentle voice, and everybody listened to him attentively.

'Two *burkhans*,' he said (*Burkhan, burkhan*, Andrei wondered. Ah, I've got it: it means a god, one of those queer figures you see in curio-shops). 'Two *burkhans*, when they created man, took counsel together about what kind of soul they should give him. "White as a swan," said one. "Black as a crow," said the other. "But if he has a black soul, he'll go to Hell," said the first. Said the second: "But if he has a white soul, how can he kill sheep? He'll starve to death." So they decided to give man a piebald soul, like a magpie.'

Andrei noticed Sukhi-Bator frown.

'I'm not defending the Hutukhtu,' the Mongol went on gently. 'He has a piebald soul. But he's worth more to us than the Chinese. And Ungern drove the Chinese out.'

Andrei was on the point of speaking, but Danzan anticipated him.

At this moment Dorji went out to see that all was safe, and it was not until later that Andrei learnt what the ex-lama said. On the other hand, he could study him at his leisure. Danzan would be about forty, or forty-five, perhaps. He had a lean, immobile face—that's unusual, Andrei reflected, a face both lean and immobile, it's generally the other way round—a tanned skin, all lines and crowsfeet, and keen black eyes, which summed a man up in a second.

He said that Mongolia had suffered under China, then

under Russia, then under China again, and that it would go on suffering under either Russia or Japan. They must ignore the Hutukhtu, and think first of all about recovering their independence.

Everybody was seized with extraordinary animation. All the Mongols talked at once.

Sukhi-Bator damped their enthusiasm.

'To become independent,' he said, 'we must fight. To fight, we must have men, we must have arms. Ungern has driven out the Chinese. How are we going to drive out Ungern?'

Everybody realized that he was right. Faces darkened. Only the old man mumbled something about Genghis Khan, but nobody listened to him. Obviously he was not taken seriously.

Everybody seemed downcast, hopeless. But the ex-printer who had something at the back of his mind, spoke up again.

'Our princes used to receive presents from the Chinese Emperor, and they forced us, for our part, to herd their flocks, and they made our women collect *argal* for their fires. Then the Chinese went, and the Russians came. It was the Russian Emperor who sent presents to our princes, but we went on herding flocks and collecting *argal*. Russia has stopped sending presents to our princes, because the Russian *arats* have driven out their emperor. But the Russian *arats* have sent us a friend.'

Andreï saw what Sukhi-Bator was driving at. He spoke up in his turn.

'The Mongol *arats* and the Russian *arats* have one and the same enemy. To be strong, they must be united.'

'Tell us about Ungern,' said Danzan, and in his eyes Andreï could read mute approval.

Andreï started talking about the Bloody Baron. He had to choose the simplest words to enable Dorji to translate. So he stuck to simple things: punitive expeditions, rape,

torture, murder. Then he told them about the struggle waged by the irregulars, the Russian *arats* winter in the forest, snow on the tracks, death at every turn. He told them how, on November 20, 1920, he and his comrades had entered Dauria.

'The station and the town were deserted. The day was drawing to a close. All was silent in the barracks. We went through them, revolvers in hand. The sound of our steps peopled the building, and doors slammed behind us. One of us who had gone on ahead fired his revolver. All of us made a rush, but there was nobody there.'

Dorji pulled him by the sleeve, and Andrei spoke more slowly as he went on:

'The door of the prison was open. I was the first to enter it. It was so dark that I waited for a few moments without stirring. Then we went forward, one behind the other. In a cell, lying on the ground, we found two corpses. I bent over them. The frost had retarded decomposition. I didn't know the two men, but I saw at once that they didn't belong to the country. One of them was of pronounced Jewish type. His body up to his waist was reduced to pulp. The other had a hole in his forehead. We learnt afterwards that they were two comrades who had been sent from Moscow to bring us instructions. They must have fallen into Ungern's hands. They did not know the country. It was madness to send them, but there was no choice. They never made contact with us. It was we who found them. And they . . . they were dead.'

'The White leader holds happiness in his hands,' said the old man, and everybody's eyes turned away from Andrei and concentrated upon him.

'There have been a score of White leaders, fifty of them, a hundred of them,' retorted Andrei. 'And all of them fled before the Russian *arats*.'

His voice had stopped trembling. He talked about his Party.

Out of their slanting eyes, the Mongols followed the movements of his lips. Danzan and Sukhi-Bator asked him questions.

'...and with the victory of Communism,' Andrei wound up.

'And then?' inquired the old man.

'Explain to him,' said Dorji.

'And then,' said Andrei, 'men will be able to live like men.'

'And then,' Dorji translated, 'men will have easy minds, and their cups will be full. And now,' he added, 'we'd better break up.'

In groups of twos and threes, the Mongols glided away. The boy, who had said nothing all the time, was the last to go. He came over to Andrei and smiled at him again. He could not speak Russian, and Andrei was equally ignorant of his language. The youth hesitated, and then, putting out his hand, as he had seen Russians do, he said.

'Neukeur!'

'Neukeur!' replied Andrei, and he clasped the Mongol's hand. They stayed like that for a moment or two, smiling at one another and holding hands. Then the boy went away.

URGA HAD been taken on February 3 With Ungern, fire came down from the heights, Maimacheng burst into flames Until nightfall the town was given over to sack Then the Baron gave orders to hang a few of the looters by way of example They were picked out among the Mongols at random Soon they were swinging outside the doors of pillaged shops, with their eyes starting out of their heads and their tongues looking like blue, venomous flowers in full bloom In their stiffened hands were placed pieces of stuff they had stolen

Zabiakin opened the gates of the prison, into which the Chinese commander had flung Mongol suspects and Russian families pell-mell Its basement cells were saturated with stench For the moment, they remained empty The time for arresting had not yet come The time for killing had not yet gone When night fell, like a curtain in a theatre, men and beasts, worn out by three days of fighting, dropped wherever sleep surprised them Until dawn, the wounded lingered among the living and the dead, both equally insensible

The next day the cleaning-up of the town began It was taken for granted that all Communists and all Jews were to be massacred men, women, and children

'The Mongol Khans,' remarked Sudzuki, in a conversational tone of voice, 'spared newborn babies those who did not come up to the hubs of their chariot-wheels'

Ungern showed no sign of having heard what he said, and the Japanese officer dropped the subject He

was not particularly interested in the fate of Jewish babies

The day was comparatively calm. There were only a few shots here and there, low groans or loud shouts, the occasional gallop of a horse. By four o'clock everything was quiet. The people of Urga, locked in their homes, sneaked careful glances out of the windows. All they could see were spruce officers strolling about the streets and looking at the house-fronts with indifferent eyes.

At nightfall the people closed their shutters and made sure of bolts and bars. Urga settled down. Children went to sleep at their normal time, and parents sat up not much later than usual. One after the other, the lights in windows went out. Artizans, shopkeepers, clerks, professional men took their rest in the shelter of eiderdowns, of familiar, welcoming bosoms, of sleep.

About midnight the Cossacks started spreading through the town. The snow barely crackled under their horses' hooves. In their impatience they had unsheathed their sabres and unbuttoned their trousers.

By morning not a single Jew was left alive in Urga, with the exception of a woman dentist who owed her provisional salvation to the Baron's toothache, which he could not stand any longer.

Fresh corpses were added to the dead of the days before. They were to be seen sprawling outside the broken-down doors of their homes, amid the debris of furniture. Clad in nightshirts or dressing-gowns, with their nightcaps and half their skulls severed by sabre-cuts, and their hands tied behind their backs, they lay in the midst of feathers from eiderdowns, or maybe the relaxed springs of an armchair or shreds of blood-stained linen. Women seemed to be doing the splits.

Children variously butchered were lying along the fences. There was one whose hand, ground beneath the heel of a boot, was driven into the snow pell-mell with bits

of a broken saucer The bones and the porcelain were the same intense white Near by an old man, with grey legs shrivelled like dead branches, seemed to sleep, with his throat cut

Urga was purified But the stench of its purification began to infect the streets Even when they were dead, Communists and Jews were still a nuisance Laurenz, who boasted that he could tell a Jew-boy by his smell, would have been hard put to it to tell a Jew from a Russian or a Chinese in this way On the other hand, as he pointed out, they had been right every time in exterminating the circumcised with their whole brood

'The brats,' he said, 'stink just as badly as their fathers and mothers'

Ungern gave orders to mobilize the civil population and bury the corpses Tubanov showed himself very much surprised at this

'What's the use?' he asked 'The Mongols never bury their dead They wouldn't understand it'

'I don't care,' replied Ungern 'You can't get along the streets any more'

'It's only a matter of two or three days,' Tubanov persisted 'Leave it to the dogs'

'All the dogs in Urga wouldn't be enough,' said the Baron, carrying on the argument automatically His face registered disgust 'Keep your advice to yourself' he flared out

Ungern had had his tent set up in a courtyard He had persisted in refusing any lodging that was offered him He could not have said whether he counted on attaching the nomad Mongols to him in this way, or whether the least comfort had become unendurable to him He spent whole days in his tent, surrounded by reports and maps of China

Sudzuki was rarely visible The Baron got his Buriat orderly, Atcharov, to follow him Atcharov reported that

the Japanese officer visited Mongol dignitaries, and sometimes went for long rides with Laurenz

Ungern dismissed his orderly, and plunged back into his study of his maps. Now and again he looked up and sniffed the air with satisfaction, staring straight in front of him out of his white eyes.

A Chinese regiment, coming from the north, had tried to cut their way through to Urga, which they believed was still occupied by their side. They had been hemmed in among the extinct volcanoes near the Bogdo-Ula and exterminated with hand-grenades.

Since then comparative calm had settled down upon the district. Ungern's agent in Peking informed him that the Chinese authorities were credited with the intention of entrusting the pacification of Mongolia to Marshals Chang Tso-lin and Tsao-kun. Great dismay had been aroused in the Chinese capital by the news of the fall of Urga, all the more because, for several days, the nationality and strength of the attackers remained unknown. Now the newspapers were making a great fuss about the participation of Japanese in the fighting.

Any danger to Ungern, his agent added, was far from imminent. The marshals seemed in no hurry to obey the orders of the Government, which, for that matter, was in their pockets. Into the bargain, the central authorities were equally concerned about the activities of a certain Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who had created a definitely revolutionary party in Canton.

Colonel Sipailov, whom Ungern had appointed chief of police, had formed a gang of stranglers. In addition to the colonel himself, there were five of them: two officers and three soldiers, one of whom was Hermann Bogdanov, a silent man with three fingers of his right hand missing. They presented themselves in a body at their victim's, and, while one of the officers engaged him in conversation, the appointed executant approached him from behind.

and, with the ease of long practice, slipped a noose round his neck, or simply put forward his two hands, with the fingers spread out

Sipailov never tired of telling anybody who would listen to him that even the feel of his hands against the skin of the victim's neck—'it's particularly soft under the ears, just like the inside of a thigh'—was nothing by comparison with the moment when, standing in front of an unsuspecting person, he saw two outstretched arms appear from behind him

'Whenever I can,' he said, 'I lure the quarry to the threshold of a door ajar. In that way, I don't see the preliminaries. I talk and talk, I get quite worked up—and, like lightning ten fingers spring forward, and the quarry falls backward.'

The Strangler paused, and added

'When there are only seven fingers, I know it's Bogdanov.'

Sipailov's big head wagged on his too-thin neck, and he spluttered as he spoke

Meanwhile life had resumed its normal course. The officers spent their time drinking and making love to the wives of resident Russians. Rezhukhin studied a new game of patience. The Baron's temper had improved. He kept away from his men. If he happened to meet one who was too obviously fuddled, he simply sent him to spend a day or two on the roof of the nearest house.

Maimacheng, where the troops were quartered, thus presented a curious spectacle. Officers and men were to be seen motionless for hours on roofs, standing, sitting, or lying down. Some of them walked up and down, others looked round them or engaged in whispered conversations from roof to roof. At night they were to be seen curled up in the shelter of a chimney.

Ever since he had rescued the Living Buddha, Tubanov was bursting with immeasurable self-conceit. He had got

a uniform made for him out of the yellow material from which the lamas' robes were made. A flood of ribbons descended in a cascade from his left shoulder to his red belt, in which were stuck two revolvers, without holsters, and a dagger. A green forage cap completed his uniform.

Thus arrayed, Tubanov thought himself irresistible. He perorated even more than ever and everything about him hinted that he was the real master of Urga. He had become very mysterious, and his sentences ended with knowing winks. No longer did he take the trouble to translate the Mongol expressions with which he embellished his conversation. Interrupting himself in the midst of a flood of words, he gave you to understand that there would soon be news from Lhasa. He talked about the Dalai Lama as though he were an old acquaintance—with mingled respect and familiarity.

If Ungern was in a better temper, it was because he was assailed by favourable omens. Two wolves had crossed a track in front of the Baron's horse, and the cracks in a sheep's shoulder-blade which a Buriat sorcerer had thrust into live charcoal had revealed nothing to hinder him. In the Kobdo region, rumour ran that the rocks would soon open and let out a blond youth and a swarm of locusts with brass heads. The locusts would destroy the Chinese, and the youth would reign over Mongolia and China. Finally, Ungern was less sour because his tooth had stopped aching.

When Makeev, taking his courage in both hands, asked his permission to give a little party by way of a house-warming for his new quarters, the Baron gave vent to a brief laugh and said

'Why, certainly, certainly!'

The captain was faithful to the traditions of the imperial army. He wanted to create once more for his

guests that atmosphere of comfort and hospitality which, before the war, made ladies living in little holes in the provinces so ardently long for the arrival of a regiment a cavalry regiment for choice Its coming set them blushing weeks in advance

The guests started arriving about nine o'clock officers, a few ex-officials stranded in Urga, and their wives

'The Mongols are regular savages, or, if you prefer to put it that way, simply grown-up children,' said somebody in a frock-coat, dogmatically Though he could see only the back of him, Makeev recognized him by his moustache, which stuck out on either side of his head, as the former interpreter at the Russian consulate

'I remember the time when a delegation of Mongol princes went to Saint Petersburg, in 1913 Mongolia had just proclaimed its independence The princes took it into their heads to inform foreign diplomats of the fact, and also to obtain a loan Of course, they were received in audience by His Majesty and the ministers, and they were taken to see the art galleries, the Peter and Paul Fortress, and the State Bank, where they were able to admire our gold reserve A review was held in their honour They set off again without having met any foreign diplomats or obtaining their loan On the other hand, they had received any number of decorations I saw them when they got back Of all they had seen, what struck them most was the circus and the Minister of War's uniform '

'That was a fine year, 1913,' pensively remarked a lady in a mignonette dress adorned with a mauve panel 'Do you remember the New Year party at the consulate?'

'Do I remember it? Why, the whole of Urga society were there And those officers who had just arrived '

'The Cossack regiment from Verkh-Udinsk The colonel was such a charming man '

'Charming and unhappy,' added a lady with a lorgnette

'Unhappy? Why do you say that?'

'Because of that wife of his One need only be a psychologist'

With a knowing air, she let her lorgnette drop on her bicephalous bust, topped off with a brooch

'Still,' said the lady in the mignonette dress, 'we didn't have any cards that night'

'But we had two sketches staged by amateurs belonging to the best society, and they were such a success Dear Liuba, our consul-general, revealed himself a great actor Do you remember when he came on with a tray and a napkin, and said "Save yourselves! Here's mother-in-law!"? And that air he sang Tra-la-la-la'

'Tra-la-la-la-tra-la'

'We didn't sit down to table till midnight,' cooed mignonette

'And we danced till dawn,' sighed lorgnette

Supper was served The company resembled an iceberg, with only one-seventh of it sticking out of the water On the surface there were no more than smiles barely significant, glances a trifle languishing But under the tablecloth hands fondled plump knees and adventured among garters

The time for toasts had arrived when the door opened Sipailov's bent figure stood out on the threshold

Though he had not been invited, the Strangler seemed quite at his ease He rubbed his hands, which were moist, as usual, and sneered

'Captain Makeev is wanted at once by the divisional commander,' he muttered, without looking at his host His eyes ferreted right and left

'What for?'

'I don't know, my dear fellow, I don't know'

Sipailov took his leave without shutting the door, delighted to have spoiled the evening

Makeev dropped back into his seat

'Well, that finishes it,' he said

His gaiety evaporated. He was sorry he had ever had a party, or told the Baron about it. Without listening to guests who besought him to saddle his horse and try to get away, he crossed the room, picked up two revolvers, and went out into the street.

That same night, before interrupting Makeev's party, Sipailov had presented himself at the Baron's.

Civilian suspects were getting rare in Urga. The chief of police was sorry he had not made them last longer. He had fallen back on the officers.

As always when he was excited, he spluttered as he spoke. His head wagged on his too-thin neck. In his hand he had a sheet of paper. He handed it to Ungern.

It was a note written in English, without address or signature. It said that the general commanding the Asiatic division was showing leanings towards independence, and that, if they became more pronounced, it would be wise to look for another 'spear-head'.

Ungern did not stop to bother about this last word, whose meaning escaped him. He had recognized Sudzuki's handwriting.

'Where did you find this?' he asked Sipailov, who was quivering with impatience. The Strangler knew no English, but he had flair.

'In Colonel Laurenz's quarters,' he replied.

'Laurenz?' The Baron broke into a laugh.

He reflected, with his head on one side. Automatically he passed his tongue over his freshly filled tooth. Should he send the Strangler? He caught a glimpse of Laurenz's trim figure. Sipailov would not fail to torture him. Besides, one should never disclose to an executant the relation between cause and effect. The idea of causality was a leader's prerogative.

'There's nothing in it,' said Ungern. 'It's of no im-

portance Now that you're here, go and fetch Makeev
for me

The aide-de-camp arrived half an hour later. The Baron was awaiting him at the opening of his tent.

'You know Laurenz, don't you?' asked the Baron.

It was a stupid question, and Ungern was annoyed with himself for feeling embarrassed.

'Yes, General,' replied Makeev, much relieved.

'He must be got rid of on the spot. Go and do it.'

Makeev set off, without asking any questions. His own life was spared, anyway.

Laurenz was asleep in his quarters. Even at night his hair was still sleek. Makeev awakened him, saluted, and said:

'Colonel, the Baron wants you. He has ordered me to tie your hands behind your back.'

'Why?'

'He was afraid you might try to harm me.'

Laurenz got up, and passed his hand over his hair and his cheeks.

'One moment,' he said, 'and I'll be with you.'

He dressed, rapidly and with precision, brushed his tunic, put it on, and twisted one of the buttons, whose double-headed eagle was not straight.

'It doesn't sound like the Baron,' he said. 'All right, tie me up.'

The two men passed sentries, who presented arms. Makeev helped the colonel into the carriage which was awaiting them, and sat down beside him. The driver, a Buriat soldier, started off at a trot.

A wind had risen, a cold wind which lashed the two officers' faces and penetrated up the sleeves of their tunics. They said nothing.

The carriage passed Ungern's tent without stopping. The Buriat whipped up his horse.

Laurenz swung round towards his neighbour. Makeev met his eyes. He saw that the colonel understood. He felt ashamed of the part he had been playing.

'You're going to kill me, aren't you?' asked Laurenz, in a calm voice

'Yes, Colonel,' replied Makeev quietly

The wind raged round the two men. The carriage was approaching the outskirts of the town. Mingling with the howling of the wind, they could already hear Urga's nocturnal orchestra: the barking of the cannibal dogs.

Laurenz remembered a journey to Harbin. A crowd in a teashop had cheered him. He had raised his glass and said: 'Gentlemen, in a month we shall all be meeting in Moscow!' He would never see Moscow again.

'Captain,' he said, 'will you take my signet-ring and give it to Lieutenant Issak? He knows my family. He may live longer than myself. If so, ask him to hand the ring over to them. Will you help me to take it off? I can't move my arms.'

Makeev tugged at the ring. It was embedded in the colonel's finger, whose joints were swollen with age and rheumatism.

'I was only twenty when I first wore it,' said the colonel, with a crooked smile, as though by way of excusing himself. He added:

'You told me one day that you liked my revolver. I'll give it to you.'

Makeev said to himself that the revolver had not brought Laurenz much luck. He found the thought unpleasant. He glanced at his companion furtively. The colonel was looking at him oddly. Did he imagine that Makeev had agreed to kill him in order to get his revolver? The captain coughed and tried to smile.

A series of strange sounds upset him still more. Without taking his eyes off him, Laurenz was laughing. It was quite an ordinary laugh, and Makeev was astonished that at first he had not understood it. A little later he heard himself laughing too. He fancied he saw the colonel wink at him, and he laughed again for all he was worth. They

might have been two hussars, coming away from a party and on their way to finish off the night among the gipsies. They had turned round face to face, and their laughter rasped their throats and shook them so much that Makeev had difficulty in finding his coat pocket and putting the revolver and the ring into it.

‘Shall I stop, Captain?’ asked the driver.

The carriage had passed the last houses in the town.

Laurenz got out first, stumbled, and nearly fell. His bonds were hurting him. He had stopped laughing. Still, he asked

‘Are you going to cut me down or shoot me?’

With a hand that trembled, Makeev drew his revolver and fired it hastily. Laurenz dropped, squirmed and groaned.

‘What a bad shot you are, Captain!’ he cried. ‘Finish me off, for the love of Heaven!’

Makeev’s sight seemed dim, the wind whistled in his ears, and his chapped lips trembled. He remembered Laurenz’s greying temples, pulled the trigger again, without looking, and waited hopefully.

‘Don’t torture me,’ moaned the wounded man. ‘Kill me, can’t you?’

With his gorge rising with disgust, Makeev went on firing, without aiming, at the big, black worm that writhed on the ground. A dog howled, very close at hand. Makeev fired shot after shot. He knew for certain that none of his bullets would kill Laurenz, but he could neither take his finger off the trigger or go closer to his victim.

The Buriat slid from his seat, rushed over to Laurenz, and fired at him point-blank. At last there was silence.

The carriage was already driving back at top speed when Makeev stood up, hammered at the driver’s back with the butt of his revolver, and shouted

‘Back to town! Hurry up, hurry up!’

FROM EVERY point of view, Tubanov's scheme was obviously quite reasonable, and the Baron was a fool to reject it. Tubanov took three steps forward, stood on tip-toe, and went back again. He had made all his calculations, and provided for everything: the crossing of the desert, the halt at the foot of the Kukunor, the ascent of the passes, the arrival at Lhasa, the reception by the Dalai Lama, the ceremonies, and the conversations, which were sure of success.

Tubanov skirted the chimney. The Baron had refused to listen to him. He had even said—just what had he said? Something about a 'Buriat' and a 'parrot'. Tubanov refused to dwell upon it. Just imagine saying a thing like that to him, the Hutukhtu's rescuer! Of course, he had answered the Baron back. Parrot, he said, why, had the Baron ever set eyes on a parrot? In Lhasa parrots flew in between the houses and perched on the shoulders of passers-by. Oh, yes, he had his reply pat, and it was then that the Baron

In his excitement, Tubanov had walked right to the edge of the roof. He looked down into the street at his feet. Lamas went by unhurriedly, and a horseman rode along at a trot and disappeared round a corner. Nobody looked up, as though a roof were precisely the right place for an officer.

As the sun was getting low, a Cossack came up on the roof, bringing Tubanov bully beef, rusks, and water. The leader of the Tibetan detachment pretended to be asleep. He waited till it was dark before eating.

When he awakened he felt less disgruntled. He had thought things over thoroughly before he went to sleep, and he had come to the conclusion that the Baron had treated him as he had done out of sheer jealousy. Ungern was furious because he himself had not thought of Tubanov's plan. An expedition to Tibet was a very simple matter, but still it had to occur to you. And, said Tubanov to himself, while I'm kicking my heels here he'll go and put my plan into execution. At any moment Tubanov expected to see a column leave the town by the southern gate.

The same Cossack came back in the course of the morning. For a moment Tubanov fancied he had come to summon him to the Baron. But the Cossack simply left some more rations beside the chimney and went off without saying a word.

Tubanov spent the next two hours taking no notice of the officers who called to him from neighbouring roofs. They were nothing but greenhorns or grocers. None of them had saved the Living Buddha.

Just what had he said that had made Ungern beside himself? He had retorted to the Baron's remark about a 'Buriat parrot'. Had he made a good retort? He remembered now. He was going to say all sorts of things. He had even begun 'Between ourselves, Baron'. It was precisely at that moment that the Baron's whip had lashed at his head and made him shut up. It was obvious that Ungern had acted solely through jealousy.

Tubanov preened himself. He stroked the ribbons which cascaded from his shoulder. Then he went and stood in the middle of the roof on one foot, like a stork. At the end of half an hour he got needles and pins in his leg and had to sit down.

The next day his self-confidence gave way to depression. The Baron meant to kill him. He was going to let him starve to death on his roof. Tubanov decided to save some of his rations.

He got bored. The passers-by still seemed to take no notice of his presence. He took up position at the edge of the roof and started spitting at anybody who came within his field of fire. His first squirt of saliva flattened out on the bald head of a lama. The lama looked up in astonishment. Tubanov waved a friendly hand at him.

'A little bird, grandfather,' he shouted good-naturedly. This occupation shortened the afternoon for him.

The third night went by just the same as the two previous ones, but it was not yet dawn when Tubanov awakened. He felt hungry, and decided to finish one of the tins of meat which he had put aside. He ate noisily, very much pleased with himself, though he was not sure why. But he had a feeling that he was on the point of working out a fresh plan, a very clever plan, which would enable him to triumph and confound the Baron.

A noise reached his ears from the street. It sounded like voices. Had the Baron sent his stranglers, with orders to get rid of his sleeping rival? Tubanov smiled. Now he knew why he had awakened. He crept to the edge of the roof and lay down flat on his face. Dawn was daubing the greyish sky, but the street was still plunged in darkness. Tubanov stared hard, but he could not see anybody. He was just thinking he must have been mistaken, when again he heard whispering.

At first he could not make out the words. He bent over as far as possible, taking care not to betray his presence, and waited. After a few moments his ears picked up snatches of a conversation. It was in Mongol. Two men, who must be right underneath him, were exchanging short hasty sentences.

Tubanov was extremely intrigued. It was unlike Mongols to meet in the street at night to discuss their business. What they were saying reached the roof only in fits and starts, but the little he heard filled Tubanov with still greater astonishment.

'The Russian can't stay with me any longer,' said one of the voices

'The Russian never goes out,' retorted the other voice, with some hesitation

'He has to eat and drink, but he doesn't speak Mongol,' went on the first voice

There was a pause Then the same voice said

'I'm going away the day after to-morrow I shall leave the house empty'

'You mean he'll go with you?'

'No He'll have to stay somewhere till my return'

'How long will you be away?'

'Ten days, twenty days, perhaps thirty'

A chilly little gust of wind drowned the reply Tubanov shivered, huddled up, and repeated the words "*Arban, horin, guchin* ten, twenty, thirty' He tried to make out what it was all about The voices below became clearer again The man who was going away must have suggested something to the other man, for he replied

'No, that's out of the question I live too near the barracks'

A series of sentences exchanged in low voices escaped Tubanov Then one sentence, spoken in a decided tone of voice, came to the surface

'I must see our friends in Kiakhta'

There was another pause

'Dorji,' suggested the second voice, 'what about your elder brother?'

'I'll go and see him at the monastery to-morrow morning'

'The soldiers would never find the Russian there'

The rest was lost in whispering

Tubanov went back to the chimney So a Russian was hidden in Urga A Bolshevik, obviously, otherwise, why should he hide? And Ungern knew nothing about him Should Tubanov tell him? No, the Baron would think

he had made it all up Ungern was good for nothing except cursing and stealing other people's plans So much the worse for him The Buriat parrot could keep his own counsel

Tubanov went to sleep again The Cossack awakened him, and told him he might come down from the roof So he had to leave the Dalai Lama's palace, about which he had been dreaming It was remarkably like the school in Verkh-Udinsk

'You shall have your statue, with feathers on it, my pupil Tubanov,' said the Dalai Lama, brandishing a whip

IT WAS night. In the Hutukhtu's palace lamas were praying and reading omens. Amid the network of cracks which furrowed the shoulder-blades of sheep, amid the crawling intestines of animals, they sought the propitious time for the coronation of Bogdo-Guighen

It was night The soldiers were sunk in sleep At three o'clock in the morning the sound of trumpets awakened the living The soldiers had to don their new uniforms, saddle their horses, and, with a band at their head, go and line the road between the palace and the great monastery, along the route which the Living Buddha would follow on his way to his crowning

Three hours passed The lamas could find no favourable omen The troops were marched back to their quarters

Daylight glided down the slopes of the hills, marked the course of the Tola with a slightly wavy line, outlined the Hutukhtu's palace on the right bank, arranged the monasteries and the highest houses in their accustomed order, and proceeded to lose itself in the narrow lanes

In the market-place the earliest passers-by set prayer-wheels in motion The wheels ground, and at every turn ten thousand prayers rose up to heaven So the sky became peopled with prayers as the market-place became peopled with passers-by

The troops took up position again between the palace and the monastery The Russians were drawn up on the left-hand side of the street, and the Mongols and Buriats on the right-hand side Behind them a crowd clustered

Nuns emerged from clefts between the houses, like big, buzzing insects. In accordance with tradition, all of them were ex-prostitutes. The memories that stirred beneath their shaven skulls, the gossip that fell from their shrunken lips, the beads which they told with expert hands, their whole bodies, old at thirty and no longer desired by men—all these now belonged to Buddha.

By this time daylight had taken full possession of the town. It shone resplendent on the princes' white horses, all beribboned, on the corpses of dogs with long, black hair, on women's coifs, spangled with silver and topped with two horns, on two Mongols squatting outside the printing-house, in course of relieving nature, on the blue and green glass bowls in the window of the Russian drug-store, on the monks in their yellow and red robes with pointed caps, on the swaying camel-caravans, on the radio-telegraph office, and, inside the Ariavolo temple, on the Buddha, with his ninety feet of gilded bronze and his smile.

Ungern was getting impatient. A chilly wind swept along the avenue. It was past nine o'clock. The Baron summoned an officer.

'Go to the palace and tell them that, if they don't begin at once, they'll have to reckon with me.'

'And what about tradition?' said Sudzuki to himself. But he said nothing aloud. He was cold too.

My first coronation, reflected Ungern. How easy it all was! How happy the crowd were!

There were old men, young men, women, girls, children, on foot and on horseback, standing on roofs and on tops of walls, thousands of faces all looking towards the palace.

'We're going to have an emperor,' said a boy.

'Mongolia's going to have an emperor,' his father corrected him.

Sukhi-Bator said nothing. He stared at the Japanese

officer who was leaning towards Ungern and whispering into his ear, with a smile

A gun was fired, and the band struck up a military march. Amid the chiming of bells and the blowing of flutes to drive away evil spirits, a coach made its appearance, preceded by horsemen streaming with silk. At every step the six white horses drawing it raised a cloud of dust, which seemed to set tinkling the hundreds of little silver bells attached to their harness.

'Asiatic division,' Ungern's command rang out, 'by ranks, attention! Officers, by the right, dress!'

The crowd knelt down. The troops shouted 'Hurrah!'

Inside the coach were two figures stifled in gold brocade. A fat woman rolled her eyes, vaguely uneasy. The Living Buddha turned his head from side to side. Through his black glasses, his capital and his people struck him as uniformly grey.

The restoration of monarchy. Now that he had made a beginning, Ungern concerned himself about the future. He ordered mobilization. Soon his detachments would be plunging into the Gobi desert. But winning battles was not enough. He must win over his adversaries. Since the Chinese generals were tearing one another to pieces, he would placate some of them and use them to crush others.

Ungern was not going to dictate this letter to Makeev. He would write it with his own hand.

'At the present time it is not possible to contemplate re-establishing monarchy in Europe, owing to the degradation of European culture, and consequently of the European peoples, who have been contaminated by the madness of socialist ideas.'

Ungern stopped to write the date at the head of the sheet of paper. March 2. The Mongol Khans used to start campaigning in the autumn, after the horses had got fat on the pastures. Ungern proposed to anticipate them.

‘For the moment all that can be undertaken is to restore the Middle Empire, embracing within it the peoples who border on it, as far as the Caspian Sea, and afterwards ’

Dungans, Sarts, Karakalpaks, Turcomans, Kalmuks, Bashkirs, Kirghiz, Tatars As far as the Caspian As far as the Volga As far as the Crimea
‘ and afterwards attempt to restore the Russian monarchy ’

Ungern went on writing Captain Sudzuki was not going to know anything about this

DORJI'S brother was a monk in the monastery of Gandon, just outside Urga. Andrei lived in the cell next to his. He wore lama's clothes, which would serve to disguise him at a distance, but he rarely went out.

Early in the morning conches awakened the inmates of the monastery. Its courtyards became filled with monks making their way slowly towards the temple. They walked round it before entering its wide-open door. Anyone looking at these grave, consequential men would find it hard to believe that almost all of them were pederasts and syphilitics, and that the only lama, apart from Dorji's brother, who was aware of Andrei's presence had sold his silence for a little dose of mercury.

During the day the monastery was full of a continual buzzing, the tinkling of the little bells hanging from the temple roof, and, every now and then, the strident summons of trumpets made out of thigh-bones encased in silver and the thunder of the *ukherburs*, more than nine feet long, whose sound imitated the bellowing of the celestial elephants.

Dorji returned to Urga on March 20 and came to see Andrei in the monastery. He informed Andrei that, just a week earlier, a People's Revolutionary Provisional Government of Mongolia had been elected in Kiakhta. Sukhi-Bator had been appointed Minister for War. A broad smile bared Dorji's teeth. Andrei slapped him on the back.

'So things are going better, eh?' he said.

Dorji's smile was tinged with mystery.

'Wait a minute,' he said. 'I've brought something for you.'

Dorji rummaged in his clothes for some little time, and finally produced a sheet of paper folded in four

Andrei stretched out his hand

'Wait a minute,' repeated Dorji

He started rummaging again His smile had disappeared

'I've lost it,' he said

'Lost what?'

'The other half of it'

Andrei took the sheet of paper and unfolded it Instinctively, he went to the door to make sure it was shut.

'I tore it in two,' Dorji went on, 'in order to hide it better I can't find the other half of it'

The six letters of the title drew Andrei's eyes Here were the pot-bellied 'D' and the double crossing of the 'A's' with which he was so familiar He looked at the date Thursday, February 10, 1921. Only six weeks ago He felt as though centuries had elapsed since his arrival in Urga The tinkling of the bells penetrated into the cell

'Do you know what this is?' asked Andrei

'Yes,' replied Dorji 'They told me It's the *Pravda*'

Andrei glanced at the sleeves of his red robe, and felt like laughing These sleeves, too long and too wide for him, were irresistibly comical

'Just imagine a lama reading the *Pravda*!' he exclaimed

The paper was yellow and the ink was grey At the folds he had to guess at the letters rather than decipher them The lines of print leapt to Andrei's eyes The editorial was entitled 'What Does This Mean?' Andrei read the end of it

'We say to all our working-class comrades Beware of excessive optimism Let us be ready for anything One word more We want peace We are against anything which would prolong the negotiations even by a second But we must not let ourselves be despoiled We are not going to give our last shirts to Messrs Briand and Pilsudski'

The *Pravda* was talking about the peace negotiations with the Poles, Andrei remembered with an effort. He ran through the telegrams. A Communist success in Germany. The number of jobless in Great Britain was estimated at 1,750,000. The trial of thirty-six Bessarabia Communists had begun at Kishinev. Street-fighting in Ireland, six killed. The British Communists were holding a congress in Leeds. By 15,324 votes to 8,723, the Swiss Socialist Party had rejected adherence to the Communist International. Arrest of Korean Communists in Japan. Minister for War Tanaka.

Heavy headlines sprawled across five columns at the foot of the page.

'Comrade Stalin's proposals, approved by the Central Committee, with reference to the Party's present tasks in connexion with the nationalities question (sixth item on the agenda of the Tenth Party Convention).'

Andrei read the last few lines.

'The common interest of the Soviet Republics in defence, on the one hand, and the re-establishment of productive resources destroyed by the war, on the other.'

The sentence broke off in the middle. Andrei looked at Dorji. He supposed the rest was somewhere between Kiakhtha and Urga.

'No,' replied Dorji. 'I made sure of it just before I got here. I still had it then.'

His face clouded. Then, in an apologetic tone, he went on.

'Our comrades said to me Andrei ought to read Comrade . . .'

He hesitated about the name.

'Comrade Stalin,' Andrei wound up for him.

THE Tola was carrying away the last of the ice. The snow was melting even in hollows in the ravines. But the water of the lakes—Dalai-nor, Buir-nor, and Kosogol—so transparent that shoals of fish could be seen passing in their depths, was still cold, and, near the banks, a thin layer of ice formed during the night, though the wind broke it when it set the dry reeds stirring.

Every day brought more birds. Flocks of geese and swans flew fast northwards. At nightfall the big duck family settled on the ponds. There were the wild duck, the most voracious of all, the sheldrake, the handsomest of all, all white and green, spotted with black and girt with fawn, the Arctic duck, tottering on its feet set behind its belly, and its faithful companion, the merganser, which swims close to the surface, with its body just submerged, the diver, which makes for the depths, and the shoveller, which stands on the bank and comes to life only at nightfall, and their cousin from Australia, the casarca, a toy duck, slimmer and sleeker than the others, daubed with red.

At noon cormorants interrupted their fishing, and moorhens came down to the ground to preen their plumage—black tinged with gleams of grey. Crested grebes walked about, sticking out their heads, lost in their feathery beards, and set on long, slim, straight necks.

The birds stayed a night or two, and then set off northwards again. Swarms of snake-birds, which fly only at night, succeeded flocks of ashen herons, which fly only by day, unless they are kept awake and lured into flight by

moonlight Perched on the summit of a hill or the top of a bush, butcher-birds studied the horizon Now and again the sound of a horn was heard in the air, and a singing swan drifted slowly across the sky

Mongolia became peopled with springs and nests, grass and shade, buds and lizards One day, at noon, a long snake, thin and grey, came out of its hole

Ungern and Sudzuki stared in silence at the dusty reptile as it warmed itself in the sun They had met by chance on the outskirts of Urga, and gone for a ride together

'They say,' remarked Sudzuki, 'that there are snakes in the Gobi desert which streak away so fast, if a shadow falls upon them, that they will go right through a camel laden with two tea-chests'

He walked his horse forward until its shadow fell upon the snake With a smile, he watched the reptile glide aside, and then settle down again in the sunshine

'So much for that legend,' he said

Ungern said nothing He seemed to like Mongolia, Sudzuki reflected It was a fine country, with its flocks and herds and its wide-open spaces which would soon be opened up for colonization

But, from the Baron's point of view, Mongolia should be merely a base of operations, a starting-point He did not seem to realize that

Once before, Sudzuki had tried to recall Ungern to a sense of reality He had no idea what effect his remarks might have had Deliberately, he had made them veiled. But now time was beginning to get short

'The winter is over,' said Sudzuki.

His little mount and Ungern's grey mare set off again at a trot Sudzuki was reminded of his rides, a few weeks earlier, with Colonel Laurenz The colonel seemed to have vanished

'By the way, Baron,' he asked, 'what's become of Laurenz? I don't see him about any more'

Ungern all but betrayed his astonishment Did Sudzuki mean to give himself away? Of all people, he should keep his mouth shut What game was he playing?

'When a spear-head goes crooked,' replied the Baron slowly, 'one gets rid of it'

Sudzuki did not seem to have heard what he said

So that's it, said Sudzuki to himself The warning which he had one day slipped in among Laurenz's papers, with every assurance that it would find its way to Ungern, had indeed reached its destination But the Baron must have imagined that Laurenz was privy to it For a moment or two, Sudzuki was sorry for Laurenz He had been the only officer in Ungern's force for whom he had felt some liking Laurenz kept himself smart, and he was a devotee of Swedish drill Poor Laurenz! He had simply served as an envelope for Sudzuki's anonymous letter He must have died without knowing what it was all about But that couldn't be helped The essential thing had been done Ungern knew now that he was not regarded as irreplaceable

Sudzuki looked up

'Spear-head, Baron?' he asked, as though he had been thinking about something else 'What spear-head?'

‘D’YOU know, I’m getting pretty fed up with our dear Mongol allies, with their passion for relieving themselves in the middle of the street. There isn’t even a decent brothel in Urga.’

‘Well, we must make the best of things.’

‘Oh, you generally do!’

Ungern’s officers were sitting round a table, presided over by Rezhukhin, with a game of patience in front of him. Makeev, in his shirt-sleeves, was inspecting his tunic carefully. The Japanese cloth had resisted the rain, if not drink-stains.

‘Sometimes,’ said Lieutenant Issak, ‘I imagine I’m back in Moscow. It’s evening, and there’s a ball at the Nobles’ Club. Carriages crowd round the door, and the drivers lean back on their boxes to control their horses. I go up the white staircase and enter the Colonnaded Hall. Civilians in evening clothes make way for me in my Horse Guards uniform. In the background the orchestra is playing a slow waltz. I can see the bows of the violins moving up and down. I make my way out of the crowd for a moment or two, and, in a window-recess, I catch sight of a girl. A virginal white dress falls straight from her shoulders. Behind her black lashes are big blue eyes, as deep as a lake. Black curls cluster round her face. I approach her. She raises her eyes slowly, and we gaze at each other in silence. My gaze becomes more intense, but she does not lower her eyes. I hold out my arms, and, without a word from her, without a murmur.’

‘You rape her right in the middle of the ball,’ barked

Makeev, and he turned his tunic over to have a look at the lining

'Captain Makeev!'

Lieutenant Issak's voice rose like the bow of a violin

'Captain Makeev, you'll withdraw those words at once, or I challenge you to a duel'

'Keep your tempers, gentlemen, keep your tempers!' Rezukhin intervened 'Makeev shouldn't have said that, and I'm sure he'll admit it'

'I am awaiting the captain's apology'

'Come, come, Lieutenant! I tell you Makeev was in the wrong, and we needn't be dramatic about it. After all, you were only imagining'

The general could scarcely be aware that, a couple of weeks earlier, Makeev had called upon Issak, and, with an air of embarrassment, handed him a signet-ring. Issak recognized it at once.

'Laurenz wanted you to hand this over to his family,' said Makeev

'To Anne, do you mean?' replied Issak 'Why, what's happened to?'

But Makeev had gone

Issak stroked the ring, which was a little too big for his finger, and his hand glided towards the revolver-holster at his belt

The door opened, and Zabiakin came in, waving a sheet of paper

'Here's something that will amuse you, gentlemen,' he said

'You needn't think we're short of amusement,' growled Makeev

'I found this in the street in Maimacheng,' Zabiakin went on

He came over to the table, and spread out a page of yellow newspaper, curiously long in format. Most of the officers gathered round him. But Makeev and Issak did not stir

'Is it a Harbin newspaper?'

'Or a Vladivostok one?'

'Better than that,' proclaimed Zabiakin triumphantly
'Look for yourselves'

One of the officers bent over the sheet of paper, and read aloud

'“Thursday, February 10, 1921 No 29 *Pravda*”
Well, what about it?'

'Why, it's the *Pravda*, the Moscow *Pravda*, don't you see? Look, it's written in the new spelling' Zabiakin was jubilant 'The first page is missing But what's left speaks for itself I've just had a glance at it'

The paper must have been folded and unfolded over and over again It was difficult to decipher the letters printed in grey ink

'Listen to this, for example,' said Zabiakin, and he read '“Cultural and educational work among the Zyrians” Has anybody ever set eyes on a Zyrene in the flesh? You haven't, eh? Well, listen “The local educational authority for the national minority has opened a competition for the compilation of a Zyrian primer for adults Arrangements are being expedited for the translation of Communist works into the Zyrian language The following works are already being printed an elementary reading-book, a selection of revolutionary verse by Zyrian poets” ’

Zabiakin could not contain himself any longer

'Just imagine that! Zyrian poets, and revolutionaries into the bargain!'

'But who are these Zyrians?' asked somebody 'Where do they live?'

'How on earth should I know? Somewhere up in the North Zyrians and Esquimaux and monkeys—they're all the same I suppose they're the same species as the Mongols Can you see our camel-men reading Communist works and writing poetry?'

General Rezukhin exerted himself to ask

'Is there any useful information?' He turned back to his game

'Yes, there is. Things don't seem to be going too well among our friends the Bolsheviks. Listen to this. "According to further information, members of the Russian Communist Party, at mass meetings in Rostov, Ekaterinodar, Saratov, and Tver, have voted by large majorities for Comrade Lenin's platform in connexion with the trades union question (Information supplied by Comrade Stalin)." If they're starting quarrelling among themselves! And listen to this, too. "At its sitting on February 8, 1921, the Council of People's Commissars, taking into consideration the gravity of the food question" etc. In other words, they're dying of hunger. There's also this article at the foot of the page. Unfortunately, the first part of it is missing.'

Zabiakin declaimed

"... other hand, and, thirdly, the need for alimentary aid on the part of the Soviet Republics which produce wheat to those which do not produce it, imperiously demand the unification of the various Soviet Republics into a single State, as the sole means of salvation from imperialist slavery and nationalist oppression."

'Sole means of salvation,' repeated the general. 'They know they're not going to last long. Go on, Lieutenant. That's very interesting.'

'There's a column here I can't read. These people print their newspapers on packing-paper. Oh, this is better. "If, from the total of 65 millions of non-Russian population, we exclude the Ukraine, White Russia, and a small part of Azerbaijan and Armenia, which have passed through the phase of industrial capitalism in greater or less degree, there remain nearly 30 millions of population, mostly Turk (Turkestan, the larger part of Azerbaijan, Daghestan, the Tatars, the Bashkirs, the Kirghiz, etc.), which

have not had time to pass through the capitalist phase, possess little or no industrial proletariat, and have usually either preserved the economics of pasturage and patriarchal organization (Kirghizia, Bashkiria, Northern Caucasus), or not yet emerged from the primitive forms of the semi-patriarchal, semi-feudal phase (Azerbaijan, Crimea, etc), but, on the other hand, have already been swept into the main stream of Soviet development. The task before the Party is to help the working masses among these peoples to liquidate the survivals of the patriarchal-feudal relationship, and to associate them with the construction of Soviet economics on the basis of soviets of the working peasants, by means of the creation, among these populations, of strong Communist organizations. These organizations should use the experience of the Russian workers and peasants in the sphere of Soviet economic construction. At the same time, in their constructive work they will have to take into account all the peculiarities of the existing economic situation, the class-structure, the culture, and the life of the respective peoples ” ”

‘Can’t make head or tail of that,’ interrupted Rezukhin ‘Doesn’t mean a thing to me. What’s the article called?’

‘The beginning’s missing. There’s only a sub-title “The tasks before the Russian Communist Party ” ’

‘And how’s it signed?’

‘There’s no author’s name ’

‘Some Jew, I suppose ’

The reading went on. Tubanov unscrewed one of the lenses of his field-glasses, and with its help blurred passages were deciphered. Every line was passed through a sieve, from small news items—‘Death of P. A. Kropotkin’, ‘In search of bread’—to the very last line of all ‘Circulation of the *Pravda* newspaper. 250,000 copies’ (‘Just imagine that, 250,000! Like hell, it is!’) On page three, Zabiakin unearthed the theatrical news

‘“To-day in the theatres,”’ he read ‘“Grand Theatre
The Queen of Spades Artistic Theatre *Madame Angot’s*
Daughter”’

‘That’s enough,’ interjected Issak

‘“First Studio Chekhov Evening,”’ Zabiakin went on
‘“Kamerny *L’annonce faite à Marie* Children’s Theatre
Mowgly”’

‘Stop it, please!’ pleaded Issak

‘*Queen of Spades*, Chekhov Evening,’ chanted Zabiakin

‘What’s on at the Nobles’ Club?’ asked Makeev

Issak was on the point of springing at him Zabiakin
intervened

‘I’ve kept the best thing to the end,’ he said ‘If this
doesn’t amuse you’

‘Go ahead’

‘“Working-class Life,”’ announced Zabiakin ‘Ladies
and gentlemen, you are about to have the pleasure of
watching the celebrated conjurer Raoul Ferdinand de la
Marquise in his world-famous show’

A laugh or two, rather half-hearted, greeted this open-
ing With his pointed skull and his yellow complexion,
the lieutenant might very well pass for a clown

‘We shall now begin Attention, ladies and gentle-
men! This famous show is entitled “Letter to President
of the Council of People’s Commissars, Comrade Lenin”
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!’

Zabiakin blew out his cheeks and slapped his thighs in
imitation of a bandsman at a fair

‘“Most esteemed Vladimir Ilytch,”’ he began, in a
falsetto voice

General Rezukhin settled into his chair, with a smile on
his lips

‘“We, the manual workers, men and women, and cler-
ical staff of the ‘Third International’ pit and minor pits
of the third Don Basin mine,”’ Zabiakin went on, mimick-
ing a Jewish accent, ‘“send you our warmest proletarian

greetings and wish every success to the world proletarian revolution under your leadership ” ’

‘Very well rendered,’ said Makeev ‘Vorkers!’ he added, with a sneer ‘And vot you vant for a vatch?’

‘“With our greetings and this letter, we are sending you 30,000 *pouds* of anthracite for the proletariat of Moscow, hewn on Sundays during the month of June, in accordance with the decision of a workers’ meeting ” ’

‘And vot you vant for a vatch?’ repeated Makeev

‘“Working in damp, dark, and gloomy pits, we miners, ragged, barefoot, and half-starved though we are, have faith in the future Communist harvest of which the workers of the Soviet Republic are the sowers We shall do our utmost to hew as much as possible of the millions of *pouds* of coal to be found in the Donetz mines, in order to provide fuel for the population of our villages, towns, and cities, set our factories and engineering shops working, and take the brakes off the scores of locomotives, those giants of steel, at present resting in the graveyards which our railway junctions have become ” ’

Zabiakin had dropped his Jewish accent He was in a hurry to get to the end Yet a little earlier he had found this letter irresistibly comical

‘“It is upon us that are fixed the eyes, full of hope, of the workers and peasants of the Soviet Republic and the working masses in all countries, for the fate of the working class rests upon us ” ’

Zabiakin paused for a moment, but Makeev did not respond

‘“Just as the Red Army has crowned our hopes, so we shall endeavour to be worthy of their hopes in the eyes of the Revolution With our bayonets we miners, together with the Red Army, shall clear the way to peace With our picks, our hammers, and our spades we shall also clear the way to Communism ” ’

Nobody laughed Issak twisted his signet-ring absent-

mindedly Makeev was absorbed in studying his tunic. Decidedly this Japanese cloth was a mess. Yes, you're in a fine Japanese mess, Captain.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' Zabiakin started again.

'Oh, drop it!' exclaimed somebody.

'Queen of Spades, Queen of Spades,' chanted Rezukhin.

'If pretty little girls
Like birds were made,
To turn into a twig
I wouldn't be afraid
And then

An inarticulate groan sounded from a corner. With his jaws set, Lieutenant Issak was gnawing at his fist convulsively.

'Anne!' he cried, suddenly shaken all over with sobs, 'Anne!'

As usual, Sipailov came in on tip-toe, without knocking. Small and stooped, he stood in the doorway, rubbing his hands and looking around him with blinking eyes. He seemed to take a certain amount of pleasure in the disgust he inspired. Mincing forward, he studied the silent officers, the sobbing lieutenant, the table with the *Pravda* lying on it.

'Deportment, ladies, deportment!' mimicked Sipailov, and his palms rubbed together more rapidly than ever. He might have been always cold.

He rubs his hands together when he's nothing better to do with them, Makeev said to himself, loathing the sight of him, and he muttered.

'Hullo, here's the Strangler!'

Sipailov overheard Makeev's remark, and his throat filled with gurgles. It was his way of laughing.

'Resting after a hard day's work?' he said, half-interrogatively, half affirmatively. Nobody answered him.

The Strangler shuffled across the room, on the look-out

for an insult. His eyes fell on the newspaper. He bent over it, and straightened himself up again almost at once.

'Hullo, hullo!' he said.

The officers kept silent like schoolboys taken at fault. Sipailov looked round at them slowly, one after the other.

Rezukhin was moving cards. Makcev was putting on his tunic. Tubanov was carefully disentangling the ribbons which streamed from his shoulder.

Only Issak was taking no notice. His eyes were fixed on something beyond his comrades, beyond Mongolia. On one of his fingers, Sipailov caught sight of a ring which he fancied he had seen before somewhere else.

Zabiakin coughed.

'I found that paper in the street,' he said, in an unsteady voice.

Sipailov did not seem to hear him.

'You surprise me, gentlemen,' he said. 'Did you ever hear of newspapers walking about all by themselves?' Again a gurgle escaped from his throat. 'Do you realize what this means?' He flicked the newspaper with his finger-nail. 'It means that there are Bolsheviki in Urga.' He swung round towards Zabiakin. 'Where did you find it?'

'In Maimacheng. I can show you the exact place.'

'You didn't notice anybody about?'

'No, I didn't.'

'No clue at all, eh?'

For the last few moments, Tubanov had been wanting his say. His tongue was itching.

'In Maimacheng, you say?' Sipailov repeated.

'I . . . I might . . . ' Tubanov began.

He stopped as his eyes met Sipailov's. How was he going to explain his previous silence? But his urge to talk was too strong for him.

'One night,' he went on, 'when I was on a roof . . . '

The Strangler listened to Tubanov's story in silence. He interrupted it only to ask

'Hidden with a lama in the monastery, you say?'

At the end, he remarked, with a sneer

'There are Dorj's by the hundred, and all of them have brothers who are lamas.'

'But this Dorj,' Tubanov wound up, 'said that he was going to Kiakhta, and that he would be back in thirty days at the latest.'

He had recovered his self-confidence. With a complacent air, he explained to the other officers

'In Mongol, thirty is *guchin*.'

Sipailov folded the newspaper up carefully. His eyes had stopped blinking. They were fixed, glazed, and void of expression, like those of a dead fish.

ANDREI never left his cell except at night, when the monastery was asleep. Usually, however, his comrades came to see him. They looked back in astonishment at the time when there were only twenty-three of them. In three months they had made great progress, especially among the younger men. In Maimacheng bungalows, in nomad tents, and in monasteries were now to be found members of the Mongol People's Revolutionary Party. Genghis-Khan's language was enriched with new words—*ogtabrin hubiskhal* October revolution, *eb hamtain nam* Communist Party, *prolitar* proletarian, *internatsanal* International, *Linin* Lenin.

It would have been superfluous to teach the Mongols to hate Ungern. The Baron did that for himself. Russian bullets killed no less surely than Chinese bullets. Once more liberation had proved only a mockery.

Still, something was changed. For centuries past the higher clergy and the princes had treated the populace, the "black men", with a certain amount of patriarchal kindness. They themselves, indeed, had sometimes suffered from the conqueror's exactions. That was all over now.

At Ungern's orders, the Hutukhtu had decreed general mobilization, and the Baron was in command of the Mongolian army. Just as the Chinese had done before them, the Russians policed Uрга, but this time it was with the blessing of the Living Buddha. The Russians had the whip hand. The flocks and herds, and even the lives, of the people were at the mercy of requisitions or an officer's bad temper. A Mongolian Government, a phantom Govern-

ment if ever there was one, botched together laws whose effect was essentially retroactive, since they were intended to justify the past crimes of Ungern and his men. The new Minister of War, Jan-Balon, had guarded the flocks that followed Ungern's column. The officers treated him familiarly and called him Vaska, just as they used to do when he was a shepherd.

'The people,' Andrei explained to Dorji, 'accepted without murmuring a form of slavery which had scarcely been modified for centuries. Ungern's arrival brought their exploitation to a crisis, because it presented the Hutukhtu and the princes in the light of accomplices of the White Guards. So far, so good. What follows? What follows is that a struggle against Ungern is impossible, unless it is bound up with a struggle against the feudal régime, which the Baron has simply strengthened. Is that clear? It is clear.'

'The people are against mobilization,' replied Dorji. 'They say "*Tanikhu ugher noin bara, tanikhu ugher gatszat tamu*".'

Andrei could not understand Mongol. Dorji translated.

'"An unknown leader is a tiger, an unknown land is a hell".'

'Ungern is certainly a tiger,' Andrei went on. 'But we must go further. Behind Ungern we find Japan. I was just saying that, to overthrow the Baron, we must undertake a struggle against Mongol feudalism. I will now add and against Japanese imperialism. Is that clear?'

'It is clear,' replied Dorji, with a smile.

Meanwhile, clad in a lama's red robe, Andrei spent his time teaching Mongols the rules of clandestine political activity, and re-reading Stalin's proposals in connexion with the Communist Party's policy towards the question of nationalities.

Never had Andrei studied any text so closely. He knew long passages from it by heart. If he had been awakened

in the middle of the night, he would have been able to quote "The existence of capital without oppression of nationalities is as impossible as the existence of Socialism without liberation of oppressed nations and freedom for all nationalities."

He could not tell that the second half of Stalin's proposals would have been of much more immediate use to him, and that, from every point of view, it would have been better if the *Pravda* had reached him as a whole.

So far as clandestine political activity was concerned, though he had experience under Kolchak behind him, Andrei was soon forced to admit that his pupils could hardly be bettered. These men who never wrote anything down astonished him by the exactness of their memories. This applied particularly to Suzar, the boy who had come and shaken hands with Andrei at the first meeting.

It was now May, and the rumour ran that Ungern would soon be leaving Urga. The Baron had requisitioned enormous quantities of livestock and supplies. His men had new uniforms. Nobody knew for certain whether he proposed to march towards the Great Wall or the Soviet frontier. This was just what Andrei must find out before he set off again.

Suzar had managed to get into touch with a few soldiers in Ungern's division: a Tatar, a Mongol, a Buriat, and three Russians.

The Tatar, whose cheeks were pitted with smallpox, dreamed every night about his native town, Astrakhan, and he was ready to do anything to get back there. The Mongol had been summoned by Makeev, on the day when Ungern left Dauria, to identify a dying horse. The officer had kicked him. The man had forgotten all about the kick, but he had never forgiven the officer for his indifference about the horse's death. The Buriat, for his part, had acted as driver for Makeev and Laurenz the last night of Laurenz's life, and he had finished off the colonel.

The youngest of the Russians—his blond curls looked like a fur cap—came from near Riazan. Like the Tatar, he was homesick. The second, who was older, with a mocking voice and a long, lean face, much more like an artisan's than a soldier's—he had been a shoemaker before the war—said to himself that nobody could be worse than the Baron. Despite daily contact with a rifle, his hands still had their feeling for an awl. As for the third Russian, at the time of the capture of Urga, Ungern had cut his forehead open with his whip.

These men, of course, knew nothing about Ungern's plans. Andrei champed the bit of impatience.

'I fancy,' he told Dorji, 'that Ungern's officers don't know anything about his plans either. Ungern isn't likely to take anybody into his confidence. What does his system rest upon? Simply terror. Can he trust anybody? He cannot. Take ourselves, for example. How do we set about achieving success? By persuasion. To-day, when anything new crops up, you come and consult me. To-morrow, when I am gone, if there is any change in the situation—and there are always changes—with whom will you take counsel? You will take counsel among yourselves. And if it happens that I haven't given you enough information, so much the worse for the Party. In consequence, our watchword is persuasion and trust. But how can the Baron set about persuading anybody? Can he convince people that his navel is the hub of the universe? Suppose one of his officers starts admiring his own navel, and makes up his mind to substitute it for Ungern's as the hub of the universe? In short, the Baron can't trust anybody. He has to fall back on terror. Is that clear? It is clear.'

'Suppose we bumped the Baron off?' suggested Dorji.

'Wait a minute! Personally, I've no objection. The only trouble is that his disappearance wouldn't make any difference. Why not? Because he is only an agent of Japan. If he were dead, the Japanese would find another agent

You see, Dorji, I was quite right when I said that we ought to thresh it all out. If I had explained myself better, you wouldn't trot out that only too common anarchist idea.'

Dorji frowned. The meaning of some of the things Andrei had said escaped him, but he could grasp the tone of disapproval underlying it.

'According to what people say,' Andrei went on, 'Ungern contemplates conquering China. But Japan would never let him. So he's trying to double-cross the Japanese, whose support is essential to him. The Japanese, for their part, let him get on with it, because on his side he's useful to them, pending a clean-up.'

'We have a proverb,' remarked Dorji. '*Burkheun burkheungan hulerkheumi*. It means: The gods rob one another.'

'Ungern is a very small god,' Andrei summed up. 'If he thinks he can rob Japan...'. He plunged back into his study of the *Pravda*.

A day or two later, Suzar came into his cell. The boy was breathing hard. He must have run fast and far. Andrei, who was not expecting him, stared at him questioningly. Suzar started talking excitedly in Mongol.

Andrei ended by making out two words: '*sereg sagan*, White soldier'. He imagined that Suzar had at last brought him the news he wanted about Ungern's departure. He tried to remember how one said 'Russia' and 'China' in Mongol, or 'south' and 'north'. 'South' was 'side of the past', and 'north' was 'side of the future', but what was the Mongol for that? Andrei cursed himself furiously. It was his own fault. He ought to have foreseen this sort of thing. Then two words came back to his mind: 'Chinese' and 'Russian'.

Pronouncing the words with difficulty, he asked: '*Sereg sagan Oros? K'hiatat?*'

He pointed to the north and to the south.

Suzar understood what he meant, shook his head, seized Andrei by the sleeve, and led him to the door. He repeated

'Sereg . ' He went through the motions of walking, and pointed to the path leading to the cell. Then he said 'Sereg' again, pointed his forefinger at Andrei's chest, and said another word. Andrei understood what it meant, for Suzar's finger crooked on an imaginary trigger.

Andrei began by burning the *Pravda*. As he did so, it dawned on him that the Whites must have found the other half of the paper. The idea that they might find it must have been at the back of his head for some time. Then he went to the door. Suzar stopped him. He pointed to the monastery, put an imaginary rifle to his shoulder, and drew a circle in the air. The monastery was surrounded by soldiers.

But Andrei had no choice. 'Wait in his cell till they came to kill him?' Better chance his luck.

He took a step or two across the courtyard. Standing in front of him, Suzar said

'*Namaigi ukhesenchigi tere chamaigi alana*'

Then he went back into the cell.

Andrei heard the sound of voices outside. He jumped over a wall. The next courtyard was deserted. His robe got in his way, but still he managed to slip from courtyard to courtyard until he reached a path, where he mingled with the crowd of lamas. The Mongol monks stared in surprise at this stranger clad like themselves, but nobody said anything. Andrei made his way into the Ariavolo temple.

Light and noise stopped on the threshold of the great pagoda. Andrei tried to find his bearings, but he could see nothing and hear nothing. He could simply feel the coolness of the place on his hot face. Groping his way along, he all but bumped into something that stood in his path. His eyes were getting accustomed to the dark, and he made out a lotus flower whose bronze corolla rose right over his head. He raised his eyes, and caught sight of the Buddha.

The gilded bronze of the statue was lit up here and

there with russet gleams In front of him hung yellow and light blue ribands, some huge, some tiny, more numerous than sails in a big fishing-port Flanked by bronze clouds, with his hands folded and his eyes fixed, the god smiled down from his height of ninety feet

'Hullo!' said Andrei 'You're quite right to smile For once in a way, you're going to be useful'

He went and hid behind the statue

'Next time,' he said, 'Comrade Andrei, who is so clever and thinks about everything, including the transformation of feudalism into Socialism without passing through the capitalist phase, will be good enough to think also about taking a few little precautions elementary, perhaps, but still useful Is that clear?'

He waited The Buddha said nothing

Late at night Andrei left the temple and the monastery Two hours later he left Urga

Dorji, who had got a horse for him, accompanied him to the outskirts of the town He told Andrei that Suzar was dead The boy had waited for the Whites in Andrei's cell He kept them talking, until finally they became suspicious and put a bullet in his head

Andrei bent down towards Dorji All at once Suzar's last words to him had come back into his mind

'Dorji,' he whispered, 'what does this mean?' *Namargi ukhesenchugi tere chamaigi alana*

'If they killed you, it would be the death of me just the same,' translated the Mongol, and he added 'And now off with you!'

So, said Andrei to himself, Suzar knew what he was doing He must have thought of it while he was talking to me 'If they killed you, it would be the death of me just the same' He died to gain me five minutes' start

His horse snorted and lengthened his stride Andrei patted his neck

'That is clear,' he said.

IT WAS seven centuries, to the very year, since Genghis Khan had crossed the Hindu-Kush

Ungern's grey mare trotted blithely across the deserted steppe. There were no tents, no flocks or herds. Only the whistling of the marmots disturbed the silence.

Urga had long since disappeared to the east. The Tola had fled away towards the north. There was no caravan in sight, nothing but the sun, the steppe, the marmots.

It was seven centuries, to the very year, since Genghis Khan had crossed the Hindu-Kush.

Karakorum had been a great city, peopled by Chinese merchants and Saracen warriors, Syrian priests and Russian princes. Guards were mounted at the entrance to the Khan's palace. There were a dozen pagan temples, two mosques, and one Christian church, right at the end of the town. The shopping street, the Street of the Saracens, gave shelter to markets and fairs. Craftsmen—blacksmiths, harness-makers, gold- and silversmiths, nailmakers—were to be found in the Street of the Cathayans.

The city was girt with earthen walls, in which four gates were pierced, at the four cardinal points of the compass. Oxen and chariots were sold at the south gate, horses at the north gate, corn at the east gate, and sheep at the west gate. Caravans left the city at dawn, and at nightfall the gates were closed upon palaces and temples, warriors and craftsmen. It was the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever known, across whose stretches of sand, snow, and forest a horse could gallop all the year.

long and see the crimson sunrise of the next year dawn without reaching its frontiers

If this land was deserted, it was because it was peopled by memories. The living stood aside for the dead. Every stone, every stream had its history, and this history was a history of war. The very air over the plain was riddled with arrows, like an old soldier stuffed with shell-splinters.

The valley of the Orkhon appeared in the distance. The mare, who was thirsty, lengthened her stride. Ungern's eyes sought for the city.

At first he could not see it. He knew, of course, that no Saracen caravan would come to meet him, that no dust would rise on this windless day, except the dust that was stirred by his own horse's hooves. But could you really tell, in a land where rivers were dukes?

The Orkhon sparkled with metallic gleams. Two centuries earlier, its waters, scintillating in the same way, had swallowed up a horde of Zungaris who had come to attack the Erdeni-Yu monastery and been put to flight by the roaring of the stone lions which guarded the entrance. In token of gratitude, the Emperor Yung-Heng had conferred the title of duke on the river. Every year three hundred ounces of silver—a duke's annual allowance—were thrown into the Orkhon.

Ungern entered Karakorum on horseback, as was fitting.

His mare's shoes made no sound on the thick, lush grass. All the space within the walls was carpeted with it. Ungern tried to find his bearings. He had entered by the east gate, where they used to sell corn. The walls were high and massive, but in some places they had collapsed. Furrows and hollows in the ground alone marked the sites of houses. Heaps of unbaked brick were piled here and there. There was nothing to distinguish what had once been a temple, market-place, or private house. There was nothing but stones stupidly strewn over the steppe.

The Baron dismounted. The desert came alive. The

walls were peopled with nests and the chattering of birds
Marmots mounted guard at the entrances to their holes
The bricks bristled with snakes The grass drowned every-
thing, surrounding the stones and climbing the ramparts
To it Karakorum meant no more than a slight unevenness
in the ground

Ungern crossed the meadow Not far from the opposite
wall stood a watch-tower It was half in ruins, and might
be some forty feet high Ungern climbed to the top of it,
and birds nesting in cracks in the stones climbed with him

From the top he could see a long way the Orkhon,
the slopes of the Khangai mountains, clad with dark
forests, the steppe The view was the same as ever He
need merely stay there, studying the horizon, without
lowering his eyes to that preposterous vacant lot on which
his grey mare was quietly grazing

From here Genghis Khan's sons had ruled the world
Wherever they went they conquered, and the kings of
the old continent travelled for months and years to lay
their wealth, their crowns, their lives, at the feet of the
Great Khan They made cruelty their one virtue, their
pledge of victory Cruelty carried them to the Adriatic
One must know how to be cruel. Ungern knew it

He followed the course of the Orkhon with his eyes,
in search of the Erdeni-Yu monastery whose stone lions
had repelled the Zungaris' attack But the banks of the
river were deserted

It was wisdom, it was plain common sense to be cruel
Treachery might spring from the very saddle on which
you laid your head, heavy with sleep But the dead could
not betray Only one man could command But let him
beware of those who transmitted his orders The taste for
ordering clung to their lips Let him command, and let
him keep to himself

Let him keep to himself, like his ancestors, those crusa-
ders, those wreckers, those knights-errant, those knights-

brigand To keep to oneself was the sole source of power To command alone, with no need for crutches, it sufficed to have a voice that could carry and a hand that could strike

As for those whom he spared, upon them devolved the long, hard apprenticeship to obedience Fear was a good mistress

Genghis knew that Men were not worth much They were afraid of everything, and, above all, of death They talked, they drank, they danced, they made love, but they were ready to walk on their hands and knees, to crawl on their bellies, in the presence of such little toys as one might give children for a birthday present arrows or revolvers To be sure, there was pain, too But men got used to pain It was in itself a proof that they were still alive You must turn to the essential thing You must kill, and you must let everybody know you killed Then you need only show yourself, as Genghis showed himself to Tayang

When Genghis struck, his foster-brother Jamuka was with Tayang He had betrayed Tayang to Genghis

'What are those hunting our men as wolves hunt a flock of sheep to the gate of the fold?' Tayang asked

'Those are the four dogs of my brother Genghis, which feed on human flesh,' replied Jamuka 'He keeps them tied up with iron chains Those dogs have brazen hearts, tempered teeth, and tongues like bodkins They are chastised not with whips, but with sabres They drink dew, they run like the wind, and, when there is fighting, they devour human flesh Now they are loose They are in great fettle Those four dogs are called Jibi, Kubilai, Jelmi, and Subutai'

'If that is so,' said Tayang, 'let us get away from those unfortunate men'

He turned away, and started climbing up the mountain Then he stopped and asked

'Who are those troops following the dogs? They look like chickens replete with milk, frisking and gambolling around their mother'

‘Those,’ replied Jamuka, ‘are the two tribes of Urut and Mankhut, who kill and strip all men who carry lance and sword’

‘Then let us get away from those unfortunate men,’ said Tayang again

He gave orders to continue the ascent. Then he stopped and asked once more

‘And who is that behind the troops, like a ravenous vulture?’

‘That is my brother Genghis, sheathed in armour from head to foot. Do you see him? You said “Let him but show his face, and nothing will be left of him—not so much as the hooves and skin of a sheep” But look at him now!’

‘I am afraid,’ said Tayang, and he climbed up to the top of the mountain

Ungern went down into the streets of Karakorum. The doors of temples opened to let in crowds, and the public squares swarmed with soldiers. His horse hastened to meet him, whinnying with delight. His horse which would carry him to distant lands, his friend, his one friend, his dear horse, his war-horse

Engraved on their sides, blocks of granite bore a lion’s foot, a turtle’s head, a wheel, effaced inscriptions. Ungern bent over them. Lizards, a swarm of dusty lizards, shimmered over the surface of the stone, in undulating disorder. Ungern put out his hand, and the reptiles vanished as though they had been sucked into the cracks. There was nothing left but a very ancient bas-relief. But, when Ungern sprang into his saddle, the lizards came back, and the stone streamed with them again.

The mare cleared an old irrigation-canal, now grass-grown, and galloped away across the steppe. She was not used to the whip.

The walls of re-found Karakorum stood up against the paling sky. A wind rose from the slopes of the Khangai, beyond the Orkhon, and swept across the plain. It sounded in Ungern’s ears like the roaring of stone lions.

MONGOL recruits flocked into Urga, but Ungern's officers despaired of inculcating the rules of military science into them. The nomads were not born to keep in step.

'You might as well try to drill a flock of ducks,' declared Zabiakin. 'I've heard that, before the war, the Russian army tried to raise a force of Mongol infantry. The conscripts set up tents in the dormitories and lit fires on the floor.'

Ungern had not left Urga again since his visit to Karakorum. He paid little attention to his officers' troubles. More and more often he interrupted their reports with a lash from his whip, or, stopping in the middle of a word, dismissed one whom he had just summoned in hot haste.

Little detachments of cavalry furrowed Mongolia in all directions, requisitioning cattle and massacring Chinese soldiers, who offered little or no resistance. The Mongol men fled at their approach, and the Mongol women lay down docilely on their strips of carpet.

Taolin was taken in mid-March. The moonlight made the rocks which stood up out of the ground like stone teeth look blue. Their hollows hid the survivors of the Chinese garrison. Ungern's men cleaned them up with hand-grenades.

Then it was the turn of Uddi, situated half-way between Urga and the Great Wall. After Outer Mongolia came Inner Mongolia. Every day added hundreds of square miles of desert to the Hutukhtu's territory.

The squadrons of Ungern's division proceeded to plunge into the sands of the Gobi desert. The tents of the nomads

became fewer and fewer, more and more poverty-stricken. Their inhabitants had next to nothing worth taking: the men only their blood, the women only their bodies.

'And you come and talk to me about infantry!' exclaimed Ungern. 'We're in Asia, Sudzuki. I'm afraid, with your European education, you tend to forget that in Asia all victories are won on horseback.'

'The foot-slogger despises dust,' replied Sudzuki, sententially.

Fugitives from the Chinese army swept down upon Kalgan, at the foot of the Great Wall. They were to be seen everywhere: haggard, ragged, hated by the people on whom they quartered themselves, and equally full of hatred for their own generals. Some of them, in their flight, had managed to carry away some salt or a packet of needles, and these they exchanged for food.

Rumour ran that Ungern and his men were approaching Kalgan. Peking sent troops to stop the cracks in the Great Wall. The gates of the capital were shut at sundown. Nobody knew just what strength the Baron had at his command. Out of the dappling dunes of the Gobi desert an army innumerable might sweep over China. Martial law was proclaimed in Jehol.

The Chinese Government haggled laboriously with Marshals Chang Tso-lin and Tsao-kun. Long confabulations took place daily. Every day the newspapers announced the impending departure of troops, quoting the army list numbers of the divisions and the names of the generals who would command them. The newspapers were forbidden to publish any news about Mongolia which might give rise to panic. But the authorities were unable to suppress rumours. It was said that Ungern had captured Pankiang, some sixty miles north of Kalgan.

The storm arose in the heart of the desert. The wind smote the soil and stirred up the thin crust that imprisoned the sand. It filled the *yurt*s as though they were sails.

and ripped them off the ground, knocking head over heels the men who tried to hold on to their felt walls. The dunes turned into great fountains of sand. Under a sky of sulphur and slate, the wind bore along tents, stones, and bones. The desert reared up with a roar. Through the sand-riddled air one could stare without blinking at the sun, which had gone small and crimson, like a clot of blood.

The storm crossed the Great Wall and ravaged Peking. Sand gritted under people's feet and between their teeth, it stuck in their eyes, it mingled with their saliva. It daubed temples and banks, rickshaws and European hats, with a dirty yellow.

Through the midst of the storm Ungern's outposts advanced. His horsemen seemed as numerous as the grains of sand. His squadrons plunged through the storm with bands playing and all flags unfurled—flags on which Genghis Khan's badge neighboured the two-headed eagle.

'The dust rises on the track,
The dust of the cream-coloured mare
A dark cloud rises
It is the good general whistling

The dust rises on the steppe,
The dust of the grey-blue horse
A fleecy cloud rises
It is the clever general whistling'

The army of sand submerged Korea, riddled the Sea of Japan with arrows, wrecked steamers and junks, drowned the islets, and fell upon the island of Hondo. At dawn it took possession of Kyoto. At noon it entered Tokio and Yokohama.

'The dust rises in the north,
The dust of the cloud-blue horse
A streaky cloud rises
It is the lucky general whistling'

The conquering desert went on to attack the Pacific.

'We need infantry, Baron,' said Sudzuki, once more
Ungern broke into a brief, hoarse laugh

'In Asia all battles are won on horseback Remember
Bajazet Remember Ancyra'

The Japanese officer remembered Mackensen in East
Prussia He retorted with a proverb

'Be the stirrup as long as it may, it never reaches the
ground'

Ungern laughed again, but did not answer

'For the moment all that can be undertaken is to
restore the Middle Empire, embracing within it the peoples
who border on it, as far as the Caspian Sea'

Sudzuki read over again this sentence in Ungern's
letter One of his agents had just sent him a copy of it

For some time the captain had had his suspicions that
the Baron was corresponding with Chinese generals be-
hind his back He brooded over the ingratitude of this
mercenary, who had been loaded with favours by Japan,
and also over his own responsibility He must act without
delay, and he must be tactful about it

He ran through Ungern's letter once more 'And
afterwards attempt to restore the Russian monarchy'
So Ungern imagined he could draw up a comprehensive
plan of action He imagined he could put the various
elements in it in order of urgency That was what he
imagined, when he was only a tiny part in the immense
piece of machinery of which Sudzuki himself was only
one wheel Sudzuki recalled the interview he had had in
1918 with General Tanaka, the Minister for War

'Russian patriotism was extinguished with the revolu-
tion,' said the general, 'and so much the better for us
Henceforth the Soviet can be conquered only by foreign
troops in sufficient strength'

Since then, sixty thousand Japanese soldiers had dis-
embarked on the mainland Tasks were carefully assigned

There was the army, which had its own very definite rôle. There were also the diplomats, whose business it was to cheat the watchfulness of the United States and Great Britain with fair words.

Then there were men like Sudzuki himself, living torpedoes, consenting victims of calculated indiscretions. They were active officers, retired officers, civilians, shopkeepers, colonists, planters, prospectors. At all the outposts of the Empire, in the heart of enemy territory, they abstracted plans, bought in mines and rice-fields, killed or let themselves be killed to provoke an 'incident', controlled the development of agricultural expansion, a development which consisted in three parts—plant, implant, supplant.

The newspapers never mentioned these men. They were in a different category from heroes in the public eye.

Chinese, Russians, Koreans, Mongols, Manchurians, emperors, marshals, atamans—all these, for the last sixty years, had served as spear-heads of Japanese penetration. Sudzuki was fond of that precise definition 'spear-head'. He had been unable to resist the pleasure of using it in the warning which, once already, he had addressed to Ungern. There had been hundreds of spear-heads, shining in the rays of glory for ten days or ten years, simply because they were useful for the time being, and there would be hundreds more, until the Emperor Meiji's plan became a reality.

Admirer of English universities and Swedish gymnastics though he was, Sudzuki could not think about that sacred name without a thrill. Only a mind divinely inspired could have foreseen, with such supreme lucidity, his country's inevitable destiny, its inevitable greatness. First Formosa, then Korea, next Manchuria and Mongolia, and finally a Japanese Empire stretching as far as the Caspian Sea.

Sudzuki remembered his brief stay in Tokio, a few months after his interview with General Tanaka. In the public squares of the capital, enormous maps of Japan and the Asiatic mainland were displayed. Flags adorned with the Rising Sun marked the farthest advance of the Japanese troops. From morn till eve crowds of idlers, soldiers, schoolboys, women, studied these maps intently, spelling out the barbarous sounds of Siberian names.

Chinese, Dungans, Sartes, Turcomans, Kalmuks, Bashkirs, Kirghiz, Tatars. As far as the Caspian Sea.

Sudzuki had just read that somewhere. Oh, yes, of course, it was in Ungern's letter. Such absurd megalomania on the part of a spear-head who had been very definitely intended, for reasons which were no business of his, to sink into a certain point in Transbaikalia in the summer of 1921! A spear-head—that was all he was.

Sudzuki made his way to the Baron's quarters.

The two of them talked for some little time about the weather, the results of mobilization, the Hutukhtu's health.

'Here we are in May!' remarked Sudzuki. 'Aren't you getting tired of staying in Urga?'

'I'm intending to leave soon,' replied the Baron curtly.

'Glad to hear it.' Sudzuki's face registered satisfaction. Then it became impenetrable again. 'But in that case,' he went on, 'won't you have to recall your troops who are fighting near the Great Wall at once? Better have them all concentrated, hadn't you?'

'Yes, I suppose so.' The Baron sounded evasive.

'Of course, you're not thinking of joining them, are you?' Sudzuki's tone dismissed the mere possibility.

'I don't know yet,' said Ungern, too calmly for Sudzuki's liking.

'Baron,' he said, 'I'm awaiting definite orders from Tokio from one day to the next.'

‘Are you?’

‘I mean orders concerning our Mongol forces’

Really, this little Japanese, with his ‘orders’, was ridiculous But Ungern controlled himself

‘Are you?’ he repeated

It was impossible to tell what he had at the back of his mind Sudzuki had not expected him to exercise such restraint He tried to touch the Baron’s sensitive spot

‘I hear,’ he remarked nonchalantly, ‘that you paid a visit to Karakorum recently I didn’t know you had a taste for archæology’

Sudzuki studied the Baron as he spoke He had struck home

‘It’s a very interesting science,’ he went on ‘But I’ve always left it to specialists, for fear of forgetting realities for the sake of dreams’

His insolent hints were more than Ungern could stand

‘Mind your own business!’ he burst out ‘If you take me for a spear-head, you’re mistaken’

‘So he hasn’t forgotten my letter,’ said Sudzuki to himself ‘But I’m not mistaken I know’

‘I’ll set off when I like, and where I like,’ shouted Ungern ‘It was I who conquered Mongolia, let me tell you—I, and nobody else I don’t need you You can get out, for all I care I can take Peking all right without you, and’

Ungern broke off in the middle of his sentence But Sudzuki had heard enough

‘He’s mad,’ he said to himself ‘He forgets that, if Chang Tso-lin didn’t crush him from the very first day, he owes it to us He’s mad, and that’s all about it’

But this idea did not trouble Sudzuki There was good precedent for example, the madman whom the Japanese had set up in place of the Emperor of Korea in 1907

Spear-heads could assume the most varied form, so long as they didn't get blunt

'Pardon me, Baron,' said Sudzuki quietly, 'but I really can't see what you're getting so excited about. Since we're quite in agreement, as we always have been . . '

Slowly Ungern calmed down. A dull pain was worrying at his temple. That old sabre-cut of his . . . He put his head down as he stared at Sudzuki, who sat facing him with a frank, smiling expression. The Baron was on the point of speaking, but Sudzuki anticipated him.

'Do you remember your telling me one day that the fatal mistake Germany made in 1914 was declaring war, instead of attacking at once?'

Ungern frowned and gnawed his moustache. He doubted whether he had ever said anything of the kind, but sometimes his memory played tricks with him.

'Well,' Sudzuki went on, 'if we apply your argument to the present situation . . . ' Foreseeing an objection from Ungern, he added quickly 'Given, of course, that the final goal is the conquest of the continent—well, what conclusion should we draw?'

He said to himself that they should attack Russia, which was not expecting attack, while China was only too well warned.

But the Baron said nothing. He stared in front of him, vaguely. Interrupting his argument, Sudzuki asked

'What's your latest information from your spies?'

'Pekin is mobilizing. The Government is said to be on the eve of coming to an agreement with Chang Tso-lin to attack us. In Chinese Turkestan the situation is obscure. But I can count on several Russian detachments all along the Russian frontier. Yesterday, for example, I learnt . . '

Sudzuki listened attentively, nodding his head in approval.

'You remember,' he said, 'that day when we talked about the importance of natural frontiers in time of war?'

I wonder what stops the Reds attacking Urga from the north?"

Natural frontiers? Ungern made an effort to remember that conversation. But first he must answer Sudzuki's question. Sudzuki was more of a fool than he looked.

'Do you really think,' he replied, with a sneer, 'that the irregulars would ever dare to face "the Bloody Baron" of their own free will?"

He talks about irregulars, Sudzuki noted. He believes there are still nothing more than irregulars. He's a year behind the times, or else he doesn't know what he's talking about. So much the worse—or so much the better!

'I expect you're right,' he agreed.

'They'd be very much surprised to find themselves face to face with me,' the Baron went on. 'It would be worth while to go and attack them on their own ground, without warning. One should never declare war.'

There was a buzzing at his temples.

'Just for the sake of seeing the faces they'd make!' he shouted.

'Unless they run away first,' interjected Sudzuki.

'They might try to run away,' retorted the Baron, 'but I'd catch them up. Can you see them running faster than my horses?"

'Of course, the coming of winter would make their lairs in the forest inaccessible.'

'It's only May now, Sudzuki. I've got at least four months before the first snows.'

'But we'd never be ready to set off so soon.'

'I'm ready now. I'll give the necessary orders.'

Sudzuki got up to go. At the entrance to the tent he turned round.

'Oh, just a moment, Baron! I was going to tell you about the news I had received from Tokio, but we started talking about something else.'

He rummaged in his pocket for a piece of paper. Anything would do.

'Well, the General Staff's advice concurs, point for point, with the plan for a march into Transbaikalia about which you have just told me.'

His fingers came into contact with a crumpled sheet of paper. He took it out of his pocket and waved it in the air, taking care not to unfold it.

'Point for point,' he repeated; and he could not refrain from adding 'Isn't that odd?'

But Ungern had stopped listening to him. Wearily, he raised his hand to his left temple.

'You must excuse me, Captain,' he said. 'I'm not feeling well.'

In the street Sudzuki realized that he still had the sheet of paper in his hand. He unfolded it. It was the copy of Ungern's letter which he had received that morning from one of his agents.

ONCE more Ungern read over the order he had drafted a few days earlier

‘ORDER

‘To Russian detachments

‘In the territory of Soviet Siberia,

‘No 15 Given at Urga, May 21st, 1921

‘I, Lieutenant-General Baron Ungern, commanding the Asiatic cavalry division, bring the following to the notice of all Russian units ready to fight the Reds in Russia

‘1 Russia was formed gradually out of various elements, few in number, which were welded together by unity in faith, by racial relationship, and, later, by similarity in government. So long as she was untouched by the principles of revolutionary thought, which are inapplicable to her owing to her composition and her character, Russia remained a powerful, indissoluble empire. The revolutionary storm in the West profoundly undermined the mechanism of the State by detaching the intellectuals from the main stream of national ideas and aspirations. Led by the intelligentsia, both politico-social and liberal-bureaucratic, the people—though in the depths of their hearts they remained loyal to Czar, Faith, and Fatherland—started straying from the narrow path laid down by the whole development of national thought and life. Losing sight of their country’s former greatness, hallowed by time, and of the sources of its power, the people proceeded

from revolt directed by pseudo-Czars to anarchical revolution, and ended by losing their own way

'Revolutionary thought flattered the vanity of the mob, but it did not teach the people the first principles of freedom or the first principles of construction. It inculcated only laxity, blackmail, and brigandage. First the year 1905, and afterwards the years 1916-17, witnessed the criminal, the horrible harvest of the seed sown by the revolutionaries. Russia promptly fell to pieces. Three months of revolutionary licence sufficed to destroy what many centuries had achieved. All attempts to put a brake upon the destructive instincts of the worst elements among the people proved to be too late. Then came the Bolsheviki, champions of the idea of abolishing all old national civilizations, and the work of destruction was complete. To-day Russia must be built up again, piece by piece.

'Nevertheless, among the people we observe disappointment with their new leaders and distrust of them. The people feel the need of a man whose name is familiar to them, whom they can love and respect. Only one such man exists—the man who is by right lord of the Russian soil, the Emperor of All the Russias, Michael Alexandrovitch. But, in view of the nation's errors, he has wisely decided, as announced in his Imperial Manifesto, to abstain from exercising his rights pending the time when the Russian people are cured of these errors.'

Outside ammunition-wagons rumbled. The Asiatic division, in marching order, was assembling in the main square of Urga, near the Russian consulate. Ungern went on reading

'2. I and my division, in concert with the Mongolian troops, have put an end to the illegal power of the revolutionary Chinese Bolsheviki in Mongolia, destroyed their

armed forces, taken such measures as are possible to assist in the task of unifying the country, and re-established the authority of its legal Sovereign, the Bogdo Khan. As the result of these operations, Mongolia has become the natural starting-point for a campaign to be waged against the Red Army in Soviet Siberia. Russian units are quartered in all the town and monasteries situated along the frontier. The offensive can thus be developed on the widest possible front '.

Ungern got up and went over to the window. In columns of threes, the Tibetan squadron was marching along the street. The sun shone on their weapons, their silver ornaments, the flanks of their mounts. At the head of his men Tubanov pranced in a debauch of silk and streamers.

The Baron returned to his table, turned over a few pages, and read.

'9 Commissars, Communists, and Jews, together with their families, must be exterminated. Their property must be confiscated.

'10 Sentences on guilty parties may either be disciplinary or take the form of different degrees of the death penalty. In the course of the struggle against the criminals who have destroyed and profaned Russia, it must be remembered that, on account of the complete depravation of morals and the absolute licentiousness, intellectual and physical, which now prevail in Russia, it is not possible to retain our old standard of values. "Truth and mercy" are no longer admissible. Henceforth there can only be "truth and merciless cruelty". The evil which has fallen upon the land, with the object of destroying the divine principle in the human soul, must be extirpated root and branch. The resentment of the people against their rulers, the faithful slaves of the Red doctrine, must never be checked. It must be remembered that the

question presents itself to the people "To be or not to be"

Merciless cruelty Ungern's men were familiar with it The enemy must be made familiar with it too Ungern imagined irregulars in the depths of the forests spelling out his words He saw crowded trains, roads streaming with refugees He saw red

What was it he had written? 'Sentences upon guilty parties may be either disciplinary .' Before the words 'Truth and mercy', he wrote in 'There can be only one sole, single punishment the death penalty in different degrees' Then he skipped another page

'14 We must not count upon our foreign allies, who are stricken with the same revolutionary disease, or upon anybody but ourselves It must be remembered that war feeds on war, and that only a poor leader would think of buying arms and ammunition when he has armed enemies in front of him who can provide him with the means of fighting'

From a distance came a call of trumpets The street filled with Ungern's squadrons, riding slowly The Baron leant out of the window A stream of horsemen flowed along the roadway. On their shoulder-straps two-headed eagles were foreshortened legions of silver eagles ready to wing northwards

'The nations are the prey of Socialism, which falsely preaches peace, when it is the eternal, the most uncompromising enemy of peace, for the whole purpose of Socialism is war

'Peace, the supreme blessing of peace, is essential In our struggle for peace, we must accomplish the deeds expected of us by him about whom the blessed prophet

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Daniel spoke, when he predicted the troublous times leading up to the downfall of the champions of debauchery and disaster and the coming of world-peace'

The Baron had spoiled a good deal of paper in the process of drafting this proclamation. Since he must not mention the essential thing, the reconstitution of the Mongol Empire, there was not very much left that he could say. The restoration of monarchy, the indispensability of cruelty—these were not enough. He had been driven to incorporate bits of proclamations, manifestos, newspaper articles which he had read since the beginning of the civil war.

For example, his passage about the blessing of peace had been suggested to him by a statement by a Japanese Premier, the Marquis Okuma, who had once said 'To maintain peace in the Far East is the predestined mission of Japan. In order to fulfil this mission, Japan has already declared war on China, and later on Russia.'

At the outset, the Baron had besprinkled his proclamation with Mongol proverbs. Then he had remembered that he was addressing himself to Russian peasants. He had tried to conjure up a picture of a *muzyk*—a bearded man, wearing a fur cap and carrying a shot-gun. No, that wouldn't do. Shot-guns and fur caps went with irregulars. There remained a beard—a blond beard. Ungern caught a glimpse of his childhood—and women's faces. He went back over the war—and soldiers' faces.

Then a sentence came back to his mind. 'The Russian peasant is religious.' He sent his orderly in search of a Bible, and spent some time running through its pages. He ended by discovering a prediction by the prophet Daniel. It struck him as being suitable for the tangled blond beard which he still had before his eyes.

'And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people, and there shall

be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time

‘Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried, but the wicked shall do wickedly and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand

‘And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days

‘Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days’

Ungern consulted the Bible again, took a slip of paper, and scribbled figures on it

His order was dated May 21 Since October 25, 1917, that made three complete years, one of which was a leap-year, plus the rest of '17, and also plus 141 days of 1921 Yes, that made in all 939 days 939 instead of 1335 The reckoning was badly out by a year or more

But why should he start counting only from October 25, 1917? The revolution had begun on February 27 ‘Mutinous soldiers paraded the main streets of the capital in disorder’ He had read that sentence somewhere—read it or heard it That was on February 27 He made his calculations again 240 days to the good, in all, 1179

Somebody knocked at the door The Baron did not answer Makeev came in, warily.

‘Your Excellency, the division is assembled in the square’

‘Keep quiet! I’m not ready’

So far 1179 days had elapsed There remained 156 days before Daniel’s prophecy was due for fulfilment Twenty-two weeks and two days By the end of November everything would be over

‘Your Excellency, the clergy are there Everybody is waiting for you’

‘All right, I’m coming’

The Baron got up, put on his cap, and picked up his whip from a corner Makeev swung round and opened

the door for him Ungern stopped on the threshold, hesitated, and went back on his tracks He ran over the end of his order until he came to the words 'Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days' With a stroke of his pen, he struck out 'and five' He was going to beat Daniel's prophecy by five days

His division was drawn up in the square The horsemen were clad in navy-blue Mongol robes They were armed with sabres and carbines, and held the lashes of their whips in their hands, with the butts resting on their stirrups The different squadrons were distinguished by the colours of their caps green for the Tatars, yellow for the Transbaikians, scarlet for the Baron's staff

The chaplain of the Russian consulate snuffled through the Mass Horses and men champed at the bit

'Division, ready!'

The priest was still swinging his censer when the trumpets sounded the call 'Boot, saddle, to horse and away!'

'At the trot, as you are, in column of threes, forward!'

The division got on the march The sun picked out the motley colours of caps, the silver of shoulder-straps, the band's brass instruments, and Ungern's yellow robe as he rode along the column, shouting

'Greeting, Transbaikians! Greeting, Tatars! Greeting, Buriats! Greeting, Tibetans!'

Urga was left behind, and the Mongols came out into the streets again

ONCE MORE Ungern's division was encamped in the desert

'One day,' said the Baron, 'I heard that the irregulars had unearthed a gun somewhere or other. A few weeks later, in fact, they used it in an engagement against us. I couldn't make head or tail of it. When they were alone in the forest, cut off in all directions, how had they managed to get hold of that gun? I racked my brains about it, but finally I learnt that they had found the barrel of an old howitzer which must have dated back to Peter the Great. Only the barrel, mind you. Just imagine it: two men mounted it on their backs, and a third fired it! I leave you to guess how fast and how accurate its fire was.'

'But don't you think that things have changed since then, Baron?' asked Sudzuki.

'Even if one puts things at their worst, my dear Sudzuki, after all they can't have managed to turn bearded *muysks* into a proper army within six months. It's a physical impossibility.'

'And what about the Red Army?'

'It's in the Crimea, in course of getting itself beaten by Wrangel. Not a bad fellow, Wrangel. He was my battalion commander on the Austrian front. He's a Baltic Baron, too.'

Ungern paused for a moment or two.

'The Red Army, the Red Army!' he went on irritably. 'It's a contradiction in terms. Either it's Red, or it's an army. You can have Red irregulars, Red anarchists, or

Red bomb-throwers But you can't have anything but an Imperial army'

Sudzuki said nothing

'Don't you worry, Captain!' added Ungern 'I'll throw the Reds back on Troitsko-Savsk, and blow up the tunnels on the Transbaikalian'

During the few days the march to the frontier took, Ungern did not say another word to anybody, except to give orders. The division marched by day and rested at night. Rocky country succeeded the volcanoes. When they got to the summit of a pass, the Mongols saluted the khan of the new valley which opened at their feet, nodding their heads and smiling as though they had caught sight of somebody they were delighted to see.

This was a land where men covered with hair from head to foot haunted the forests, hunting in couples and sometimes approaching camp-fires at night. It was a land where honest men setting off in search of stolen sheep button-holed Heaven to reduce a year to a month, and a month to a day. It was the land of the people whose women were women, but whose men were dogs. It was the land where Erlik, the lord of the underworld, sent his messengers to capture the straying souls of sleepers at night.

As it scaled white crags by the score and made its way through tangles of dark undergrowth by the dozen, Ungern's army looked like a river flowing in several parallel streams. Its horsemen sat their horses as though they were nailed to their saddles. Their mounts, cloud and storm-coloured, bestrode the hills, crushed the mountains underfoot, champed their bits with a noise of thunder, turned the forests into plains, reduced the rocky plateaus to dust, made themselves as small as thimbles, stretched themselves out thinner than belts.

Their riders were born to obliterate the eight continents which spread out side by side under the sun. They were

born to measure themselves with the earth and challenge the sky They were born to rule this old world and subdue the fiercest of enemies They were scions of those whose flights of arrows had killed the south sun, the north sun and the west sun They were scions of those who chose their gods by transfixing their hearts with lances and kept only the god whose heart did not tremble They were worthy of their sires Any one of them could blow down the tallest of trees from whose top the earth looked as little as a horseshoe floating on the sea

The soldier made himself as small as possible. He tried to present as little surface as he could to the wind and the rain Beside him the machine-gun braced itself against the storm too Sometimes, when a gust more violent than usual swept the plain, the soldier thought he could hear the machine-gun shivering. A few yards in front of him, a row of stakes streamed with water

There were fourteen stakes in his field of vision. The soldier counted them again He reflected that, in weather like this, if necessity arose he would have a hard time of it getting the machine-gun going He hoped its belts were not damp

His packet of cigarettes was reduced to pulp. The soldier threw it away violently, and got a splash of water down the back of his neck As he sank his neck into his shoulders and lifted his head, in the middle of his pointed cap a red star with five points became visible

Here, said Ungern to himself, begins my conquest of the continent Through his field-glasses he fancied he could make out in the distance the nearest houses of Troitsko-Savsk Or perhaps it was Moscow

In an hour his Asiatic division would enter Siberia as easily as cutting butter There was nothing to be seen of the enemy There was nothing at all to be seen but a

THE DISASTER was complete. On June 8, at dawn, the Reds counter-attacked Ungern's camp and all but surrounded it. The Asiatic division took to flight, abandoning to the enemy most of its guns, its supply train, its wounded, and its hopes of conquest.

The Baron himself was hit by a bullet in the thigh. The wound was not dangerous, but it pained him badly.

With difficulty Ungern reassembled the survivors of the division. Then he led them towards the Selenga, in Mongol territory, where he was to meet General Rezhukhin. During the march the officers learnt that units of the Red Army had reached Urga. Their main line of retreat was cut off. Henceforth the rear had ceased to exist. The front surrounded the division on all sides.

Rezhukhin had pitched his camp on the left bank of the Selenga. A bridge was hastily thrown across the river.

The horizon was wavy with the foliage of trees. The June day was scented with resin and wild flowers.

Makeev was dispatched with a few men to pitch tents in readiness for the arrival of the main body. In its turn, the right bank became clothed in crude canvas.

Rezhukhin crossed the bridge and came up to the captain. The general, too, in accordance with Ungern's orders, had tried to penetrate into Soviet territory, but he too had been beaten and thrown back by the Reds. He preferred not to talk to Makeev about that.

The two of them exchanged impressions about the weather, which had decidedly taken a turn for the better. The nights were getting warmer.

Then Makeev lowered his voice

'The Baron doesn't know anything about it,' he said, 'but we've had a lot of desertions Three Russians—and they'd been with us ever since Dauria—a fellow from Riazan and two others Then there was the Buriat driver'

Makeev stopped himself in time There was no need to enlighten the general about the details of Laurenz's death But Rezuikhin had not noticed anything He launched into a dissertation on certain Mongol customs

'And to stop syphilis,' he wound up, 'they slit a black sheep's throat'

He interrupted himself and sniffed the air

'Can't you smell something, Captain?' he asked 'There seems to me to be a stink'

Makeev drew in a deep breath of air A heavy smell of decomposition hung between the pines

'The corpse of something,' suggested the general

A dead cow shone resplendent amid the flowers Its belly was swollen like a gigantic toadstool Flies were glued to its upturned eyes

Makeev stopped his nose He would have to await the division's arrival before burying the beast He had no spades

Ungern's squadrons started emerging from the trees The horses neighed The camels glanced with lofty contempt at these flat-backed animals which thought about nothing but drinking all the time

Ungern crossed the bridge He had to make an effort not to limp Rezuikhin went to meet him, walking heavily With thousands of eyes spying on them from all sides, the two beaten generals met with a detached, nonchalant air about them

'They must have had German officers,' Rezuikhin began 'And then the weather was bad The rain'

Cossacks hastily buried the dead cow But the heavy,

sickly smell of it still hung in the air. There was not a breath of wind.

Ungern had come back shrunken and haggard. The news was bad. It couldn't be worse. General Bakch, who had reached Chinese Turkestan, had surrendered to the Bolsheviks. During the last few weeks he had gone dotty. He reviewed his men every day. Amid that barefooted mob he managed to find a man who still retained his gaping boots. 'You stupid swine,' shouted the general, 'why don't you keep your boots polished?' He had come to an inglorious end. To the east, Semionov had not stirred. Transbaikalia remained deaf to the Baron's summons and the Reds were in Urga.

Ungern raised his head, sniffed the air and shouted 'Orderly officer!'

Lieutenant Issak hastened up.

'There's a stink,' said the Baron.

Issak, standing at attention, said nothing. He found himself flung down, stripped and beaten before he had time to say that he was under Captain Makeev's orders.

'Captain Makeev!' thundered the Baron.

The aide-de-camp came up at a run.

'There's a stink,' Ungern repeated.

'Yes, Your Excellency, there is a stink.'

This suspicion of resistance delighted Ungern.

'So you don't care a damn about hygiene, eh? You want to kill us all, do you?'

'It's a dead cow, Your Excellency. They're burying it.'

Ungern turned pale.

'Silence!' he said, and he struck Makeev on the arm.

'Your Excellency, you have no right to strike me,' said Makeev.

'I've no no right!' Ungern's voice stuck in his throat. 'No right, eh? Well, you'll soon see.'

The Baron walked up and down, thinking out the most humiliating punishment. Makeev calculated quickly.

There was no roof, no ice, no desert, no prison There was nothing And he could always save himself by swimming for it

'Climb up that tree!' ordered Ungern, in a squeaky voice

The lowest branch was nine feet from the ground Makeev put his arms round the trunk, hoisted himself up with difficulty, and started climbing

'If you don't get up that tree at once, I'll shoot you like a rat,' said Ungern slowly, and he drew his revolver

Makeev made a desperate leap, cut his fingers on the branch, and clung to it

'Higher still!' ordered Ungern

When his aide-de-camp was up at the top of the tree, which bent under his weight, the Baron walked a few paces away He was by no means calmed down His defeat, the Mongols' treachery, the end of Bakitch, the bullet in his thigh, and that dead cow—he was still far from a reckoning for all this.

'Zabiakin!'

The lieutenant hurried to answer his summons

'Everything's all wrong, and nobody cares a damn Climb up that tree!'

Clumsily, Zabaikin climbed a pine

'Burdukovski! Where's that report of yours?'

'What report, Your Excellency?'

'The report you were to write for me'

The Baron was making it all up, and Burdukovski knew it, and Ungern was well aware of it.

'But I can't write, Your Excellency,' protested Burdukovski

'You can't, eh? All right, I'll teach you Get up that tree, and quick about it!'

With kicks and lashes, without even taking the trouble to go on finding pretexts, the Baron set one officer after

another attacking a tree. The slanting rays of the setting sun found the entire divisional general staff perched on branches.

A little breeze got up, stirred the tops of the pines, and drove away the stench of decomposition.

Two hours later lights-out was sounded. The camp settled into silence. Ungern undressed and made his way to the river, stark naked. The setting sun gilded his sandy hair and picked out his prominent ribs. The Baron had a long swim. Night fell. Up in the trees, the officers could hear the sound of Ungern's strokes and his breathing. Then he came out of the water, shook himself, went back to his tent, lit a candle, lay down, and opened a book. In the silence of the night the pages of the book could be heard turning. At length the candle was extinguished.

During the following days Ungern harried his men mercilessly. Henceforth he compelled them to undress before they climbed trees. He had noticed that mosquitoes swarmed in the evening along the banks of the Selenga, which was swollen by floods. Sometimes he ordered a heavily laden soldier to swim across the river on horse-back. He stood still on the bank, with his glassy eyes following the mount, swimming hard in the rapid current with its head thrown back, and the rider lashing at it. As often as not, horse and man were drowned.

The halt on the banks of the Selenga lasted a little more than a week. Towards the end of this period, aeroplanes started flying over the camp. They appeared in the morning, always at the same time, circled several times, and then flew eastwards again. Even through field-glasses it was impossible to make out the faces of the pilots as they leant out of their cockpits. Red discs were painted on the wings—the emblem of the Rising Sun.

'The Japanese command has sent them to get in touch with us,' declared Zabiakin.

'Then why don't they land?' demanded doubters.

'How can they land on tree-tops?' retorted Zabiakin
'You'll see, one of these days they'll drop a message'

Nobody asked anything better than to believe it, and
the men greeted the aeroplanes joyfully Their friendly
throbbing in the air restored confidence

'They're surprised to see us still here,' said the officers
'No doubt Semionov has already opened his attack to
the east We're the only ones who aren't on the move'

One morning the division set off It followed the course
of the river and struck north, towards the Soviet frontier
The earlier defeat was forgotten It was a mere accident
which wasn't worth remembering

'An unimportant skirmish,' declared Rezhukhin, sen-
tentiously 'But for that infernal rain'

It was not raining now, anyway, and the woods re-
echoed with song

'Well, soldiers,
Brave little boys,
Where are your beloved sisters?'

asked a voice, and the chorus was taken up

'Our beloved sisters
Are our trusty swords
Here are our beloved sisters'

The Mongols sang

'Beasts of all heads, of all heads,
Voices of all throats, of all throats,
Beasts of all isles, of all isles,
Voices of all mouths, of all mouths'

At the usual hour, the aeroplanes met the column. They
were greeted with a volley of cheers They proceeded
to accompany the column, sometimes flying low over it,
sometimes soaring up into the sky The buzz of their
propellers marked the road to victory

'Well, soldiers,
Brave little boys,
Where are your dear mothers?'

sang the Russians

'Our dear mothers
Are our white tents
Here are our dear mothers'

The division kept on the march as long as the sun was up. Next morning, the men were up first, the sun next, and the aeroplanes came last

'Horses of all hairs, of all hairs,
Men of all tents, of all tents,'

sang the Mongols

'Horses of all colours, of all colours,
Men of all lands, of all lands'

'This time the commissars had better watch out,' said General Rezukhin, as he followed the fleeting shadow of an aeroplane on the grass with his eyes

The forest was left behind and the column, wound its way over the steppe

'I didn't quite see ' began Ungern 'After all, there's nothing to stop them coming down now. I wonder whether they're waiting for us to make signs to them'

Zabiakin got some big white sheets, and they were waved in the air. The column waited, motionless. Four thousand heads were thrown back

The aeroplanes were coming down. Soon the details of their fuselages could be distinguished. The red discs swelled like those Japanese artificial flowers which expand in water

'That's funny,' remarked Rezukhin 'If they're coming down, why are they flying in Indian file? Perhaps the Japanese have some special rule.'

The outspread shadow of the first plane moved along the column. Horses reared at the very close roar of its engines. All at once the plane stood up on end and slid as though it were passing over a hump-backed bridge

Almost simultaneously the steppe uttered a hollow groan and gave vent to a whirlwind of dust. It shot up into the air, dropped half-way down again, and lashed out once more with a second clap of thunder.

The planes went up and up and up, spitting bombs by the bowlful. The plain became alive with fountains of earth, cries, and whinnies. A riderless horse zigzagged sideways, like a knight at chess, and dropped amid bloody foam.

Ungern was the first to pull himself together.
'In open order, gallop!'

A metallic trilling covered the sound of death-rattles. High in the sky, barely visible, the planes flew back towards the Soviet frontier.

Ungern's advance looked only too much like a retreat. The country was dead, and the few tents to be found were abandoned by the nomads. The men marched in silence. Once more the forest surrounded them on all sides. Finally the head of the column came to a standstill.

Before it lay a marsh, covered with close grass, venomously green. The first horseman who ventured upon this silky carpet sank up to his stirrups. His comrades saved him, but his horse was swallowed up.

The marsh was five hundred yards wide and several miles long.

'It would take us a day and a half to march round it,' reckoned Rezukhin; but Ungern did not stop to listen to him.

'Draw sabres!' he ordered. 'Cut wood!'

Shrubs surrendered themselves with reluctance from the embrace of neighbouring branches, but then lay quietly at the men's feet. They were thrown side by side across the marsh and wedged in at random. On this bridge the division crossed. It threatened to sink at any moment under the weight of horses and guns.

Ungern was in a state of hysterical excitement. He was in a hurry to reach the frontier. He had let himself be beaten outside Troitsko-Savsk, he had failed to identify the Red planes, he had lost his grip. For the past month he had had the feeling that he was being towed by a fate which he had not chosen for himself. He did not like it.

The last of the camels could not stand the damp. Their swollen feet were incapable of carrying them any farther, and they had to be abandoned. The nights became cool, humid, and starry. The division kept on ascending the course of the Selenga. The forest gave way to rocks. All trace of any track had disappeared. The gunners busied themselves around their teams, but they could not get the guns along the narrow path.

Ungern came along, cursed the gunners, and told them to get on with it.

The path was bordered on the left by a precipice, and on the right clung to a wall of rock. The guns rolled along on one wheel, with the other held up over the void by main force. In two days the division covered less than four miles.

During the evening of the second day a Buriat sorcerer made his appearance out of a cleft of rock. Nobody saw him coming. A reindeer skin, trimmed with bells, fell to his knees. The skin of an owl served him for a hat. His face, all lines and twitches, looked like a nest of vipers.

Ungern walked up to him and greeted him. The sorcerer started talking very quickly, foaming slightly at the mouth. The Baron sent for Tubanov.

'Translate!' he snapped.

Tubanov listened to the sorcerer for a few moments. He hesitated. Then he said:

'Between ourselves, he's mad.'

'Translate!' repeated Ungern, raising his whip.

'To the south-east,' Tubanov translated, 'she drinks red tea. To the north-east, she drinks chestnut tea.'

Daughter-in-law tobacco taught me to smoke, and uncle wine taught me to drink . '

'What does all that mean?' No, he wouldn't tell you Ask him whether I shall win '

Tubanov burst into a flood of Buriat words The sorcerer turned his head towards Ungern, and the owl on his forehead turned with him The man's black eyes and the bird's yellow eyes stared at the Baron

Tubanov coughed

'He says well, he says he can stop the Reds' bullets He knows the incantation But he won't tell me what it is '

'Let him come with me,' said Ungern

On the day of Ungern's attack, the sorcerer set off at the head of the troops, mounted on a white horse with a white saddle-cloth The speed of its gallop set the owl's wings fluttering It seemed to be flying over the sorcerer's head

Once more the Reds let their attackers get close up to them Through his field-glasses, Ungern could make out the sorcerer's face as he looked back His lips were tight, and all his features were quivering

Several shells burst all together The Baron lowered his glasses He pulled himself together at once But through his glasses he could not see the sorcerer any more The white horse was galloping riderless. His rider had disappeared Ungern was never to set eyes on him again

The Red soldiers counter-attacked Ungern's Asiatic division fell back on its tracks Underfoot the horses trampled the owl, flattened out on the battlefield.

BATTLE-FIELD, battle-forest, battle-rocks—the Red front hemmed in Ungern's division. It slipped in between his battalions. It surrounded his scouting patrols. Woods and stones exploded in sudden fusillades. Mongol irregulars harried Ungern. Once more salt was short, boots burst, uniforms fell into rags.

The oddest, the unlikelyst radio messages mingled in the air. Manchuli announced the capture of Troitsko-Savsk by Ungern's men. Mukden proclaimed the imminent departure for Mongolia of two divisions and five brigades under the command of Chang Tso-lin. Harbin reported the Baron's presence on the frontier of Chinese Turkestan.

Under a sky charged with cloud and rumour, Ungern's division fled in a circle.

'The Mongol lamas,' said the Baron, 'use the sky-charts of the southern hemisphere.'

He had said that before. When had he said it? During the last few days bits of the past had been coming back to him, but in baffling ways. Ungern raised his head and looked up at the moon, wan but wicked-looking, crouching in the middle of the familiar sky.

'The Southern Cross, for example,' said Tubanov.

The two of them were sitting up against a rock wall, in front of a fire nearly out. The night boiled in the gorge like a mountain torrent. The steaming dark betrayed the presence of Ungern's division, cut down in its tracks by sleep.

'I'll get supplies and uniforms from the first Chinese town I come across,' said Ungern 'After that, I'll avoid towns In three months I shall be in Lhasa.'

His tone both made a statement and asked a question Tubanov deemed it wiser to say nothing

'I ought to have begun with Tibet,' the Baron went on 'The Dalai Lama will put Asia at my disposal, and I can look after the rest The Hutukhtu is a false god I'll have him replaced'

He doesn't call me a 'Buriat parrot' now, said Tubanov to himself He filled his lungs with air and forgot to blow it out again, so puffed up was he with pride He was on the point of believing that he was Tibetan by birth

'Between ourselves,' he declared emphatically, 'the Hutukhtu is a syphilitic'

Rezukhin emerged from the darkness and stood at attention in front of the Baron

'General,' said Ungern, 'here are my orders For the time being I'm breaking off the campaign against the Reds Mongolia is contaminated with Bolshevism But that won't last Meanwhile the division will proceed to Tibet It will march south-west Give the necessary orders'

Rezukhin went purple in the face Proceed to Tibet? Why not straight to Paradise?

'I don't quite understand, Your Excellency,' said he 'Did you say that we should proceed to Tibet?'

'I said "to Tibet"', and, if you don't understand me, you must be a fool'

He's mad, said Rezukhin to himself Just imagine trying to cross the whole of China with what's left of the division! We should get ourselves cut to pieces within twenty-four hours Our sole chance of salvation is to the east, behind the shelter of Japanese bayonets

Rezukhin hesitated Then he said

'No '

'What d'you mean, No? No to what?'

'I'm not going to Tibet And my men aren't going either '

As he spoke Rezukhin stepped back two paces Ungern stared at him with his white eyes fixed At the end of his rigid arms, his hands worked feverishly

'So you refuse to obey my orders?' he managed to say, at length He found it hard to get the words out of his contracted throat

He's mad, Rezukhin repeated to himself He's fit to be tied And now he'll kill me

'I'm not going,' he said again, and his hand felt along his belt for his revolver-holster

Ungern watched Rezukhin's hand He studied his own hands, clawing at the night air Then he broke out into a laugh as hoarse as a neigh

'All right,' he said, 'all right You can take two regiments, General, and follow me a day's march behind '

Rezukhin looked at the Baron suspiciously

'Where are we going?' he asked.

'Where would you like to go?'

Ungern's tone was polite, almost obsequious It made Rezukhin's blood run cold

'The officers think, and so do I,' he replied, 'that we ought to march east into Manchuria and join Semionov '

'So that's what the officers think we ought to do, is it?' said Ungern thoughtfully 'And you think the same thing, eh? Well, the officers are funks, and so are you We're marching south-west '

'I'm not going to Tibet,' replied Rezukhin, and his blood ran cold again

'So you told me General Rezukhin is not going to Tibet All right The division will proceed to Chinese Turkestan It will march south-west. Understand?'

Chinese Turkestan lay south-west, but so did Tibet

He's lying, said Rezukhin to himself, he's lying, and he's going to kill me

'Yes, Your Excellency,' he said, 'I understand The division will proceed to Chinese Turkestan'

Ungern moved towards him, cat-like

'General,' he said, 'have you got any maps of the district?'

Taken aback, Rezukhin handed him a wallet

'Good' Ungern verified the contents of the leather folder 'You haven't got any others?'

'No, Your Excellency'

Ungern smiled

'And now,' he cried, 'get to hell out of here! I'm starting at dawn, and you will follow me with your two regiments at a distance of twenty miles I'll arrange to leave landmarks for you Or, if you like, you can try to find your way to Manchuria without maps'

Rezukhin took himself off His back felt appallingly broad The Baron's going to kill me, he said to himself As soon as my back is turned, he'll fire

But Ungern did not fire He exerted himself to think

When an arm or a leg became gangrenous, you cut it off But, above all, you must make up your mind on the spot to beat death to it Gangrene spread fast You must get ahead of it He had renounced Russia He had just sacrificed Mongolia He must make up his mind about his next battle-ground What did it matter where it was, so long as his principles were sound? And sound they were It would take longer, that was all Mongolia was only a gangrenous member He would fall back on the heart He would go to Lhasa There was something faked, something borrowed about Mongolia The Mongol lamas' star-charts

There was some memory, an old memory, a bad memory, connected with them It was in Transbaikalia, but

when? Before the war, or at Dauria? He could not put a date on that memory. To whom had he talked about star-charts, and when?

Before the war—what did that mean? There had never been any such time. First there had been his childhood, spent in the midst of women. Then came the war. He wondered what his father had been like. He had been to Asia Minor, to Turkey, to Persia, and perhaps farther afield. His name was never mentioned at home. There were only women, a whole pack of women. He must smarten himself up. He must clean his nails.

Peace fed on peace. But some people persisted in playing at peace in war-time. His officers, for example. They needed only four walls to make them forget everything they needed, indeed, still less just a bed.

The memory of those false star-charts was still worrying him. He must have talked about them to Einstein.

The name came to the surface of his mind suddenly. Ungern set off in pursuit of it, but in vain. The name had no face, no age, no nationality. It was arbitrary and self-sufficing, like a mathematical formula. It was rounded-off, just like that, and sealed on all sides. It was a name whose usage was unknown to him.

He must be done with it. He must act as he knew how to act. The map-folder he had taken from Rezukhin was here under his hand. In Tibet the star-charts would coincide with the stars.

FORESTS succeeded the steppe Ungern blazed the trail Rezukhin followed him at the head of a brigade

At the halts, Ungern's command rang out

'Prayers' Hats off'

The Russians besought their Orthodox God to come to their aid, and the Tatars testified that Allah was the one true god and Mahomet was his prophet The incantations of the Buriats mingled with the cooing of the Chinese, and their national hymn, sung by a few Japanese soldiers, stuck into this pin-cushion of prayers But Sabaoth, Allah, Buddha, Tengri, and even the Mikado remained deaf to supplication

At dawn the division set off again, leaving clusters of corpses hanging from the trees or submerged in the grass Never had Burdukovski known such a good time He had only to mention a name to the Baron Ungern knew only one punishment the death-penalty in different degrees Burdukovski pitied Sipailov, who had been left behind in Urga

Ungern kept suspicious watch on his officers and men A smile at the corner of a mouth or a glance sideways earned a death-sentence

At night, during the halts, the Baron could not sleep. It was as though the sides of his tent were collapsing under the weight of hostile shadows, as though treachery mounted guard outside He stayed for hours with his hand on the butt of his revolver and his eyes glued to the entrance. A scarcely audible rustle behind him made him jump They're going to attack me from the back, he said

to himself, and he prowled round and round and round his canvas cage, standing stock-still to listen, or turning on his heels to face his would-be assassins

His beard had grown a bristle of dirty stubble on his haggard cheeks. On the yellow silk of his robe one of his epaulets hung crooked. His moustache curved down in a great horseshoe. His Saint George's cross marked the place of his heart.

An officer made a report to him. Ungern scarcely listened. He glared at him with eyes heavy with hate and insomnia, blindly. Then, in the middle of the officer's forehead, appeared a red star with five points. Bursting into a guttural laugh, as though satisfied his predictions were coming true, Ungern flung him to the ground, lashed at him, kicked at him. The red star danced in zigzags. Then it began to pale and finally disappeared, giving place to a still body bedaubed with blood.

'Reduce him to the ranks!' shouted the Baron, and he leapt into his saddle and rode like the wind, heedless of overhanging branches. The division struck camp and followed its leader.

The officers knew how to read. Therefore they could be bought by the Bolsheviks. They were bought by the Bolsheviks. Ungern appointed his orderly Atchairov to command the Mongol regiment. Atchairov was illiterate. Ungern changed his officers every day. If a colonel let his horse cast a shoe, if a lieutenant stopped to make water, they were reduced to the ranks.

Meanwhile Buriat herdsmen had deserted. Officers armed with long whips watched over the flocks and herds.

The Buriats were not the only deserters. The Mongol detachments melted away visibly. In the evening the men were still there. At reveille half of them had disappeared. Burdukovski got up during the night in the hope of taking the deserters by surprise, but in vain.

One night, just before lights-out, as the little officer was

wandering about the camp, he caught sight of a Mongol soldier talking to a group of his comrades Burdukovski recognized him The man had joined the division at Dauria The officer went up to him and asked him what he was talking about He could not understand Mongol The soldier stood at attention and explained that he and his friends were talking about their horses

'The Russian officers do not love horses,' he said. 'They do not understand them But we Mongols love our horses'

'All right,' said Burdukovski, fixing the man's face in his mind's eye He found it hard to distinguish Yellows. But he had made up his mind to get rid of this nomad at the first opportunity

He went on Behind him the soldier's guttural voice rose again Resuming his interrupted conversation, the Mongol said

'We are not going to be Japanese subjects while we are alive, and we are not going to be Japanese spirits when we are dead'

In the morning another detachment had disappeared The Mongol who had joined at Dauria was among the deserters

The officers stopped shaving, and their shaggy beards gave them a paternal air They kept out of one another's way Old grudges among them came to life again for no reason Every one of them had but one thought to keep alive as long as possible, even though he had to denounce somebody else

The men stopped singing, or even swearing They talked only in low voices Their silken robes hung from their shoulders in rags They had no idea whither they were being led Every night the same kind of trees, the same kind of rocks, rose round the camp fire Twenty-eight officers guarded the division's flocks and herds

There was no more salt, no more bread, no more

biscuits The only food left was meat Herdsmen-captains, shepherd-lieutenants slit the throats of cows and sheep, and Burdukovski went on executing officers and soldiers alike

Flocks and herds melted away, until the day came when there were more herdsmen and shepherds than beasts

That evening Makeev was inspecting the camp He met Burdukovski The little man was purring with pleasure His lids drooped over his eyes, and his hips were swaying

'Do you want some spare boots?' he said to Makeev

'Why do you ask that?'

'I've got any number for you to choose If you'd like

'No I'm going to bed'

Burdukovski looked sad He looked supplicating

'But I beg of you to come with me, my dear fellow You really must see it Positively, you must'

'But what's it all about?'

'You'll see You'll see for yourself Come with me'

Burdukovski trotted on ahead of Makeev, turning round at every other step to see whether the captain was following him

They came to the outskirts of the camp

'Here you are!' said Burdukovski

What was left of the flocks and herds lay asleep Sitting in a circle, the officers in charge of them were talking in low voices Breathlessly, Burdukovski ran up to them He started counting them—'Three, four, five, six' Makeev could hear him muttering—nodded his head, and fought for his breath

'Take your choice,' he said to Makeev

'But I don't understand . '

'Take your choice, my dear fellow Take any you like What about these, old chap?'

Burdukovski walked over to a captain, bent down, and pulled at his feet The officer started protesting But

already Burdukovski had his boots off. He passed his hand lovingly over the leather.

'Do you like these? Do you want them? You don't, eh? Why, of course, they don't fit you! Wait a minute! I'll find something better.'

With his mincing steps, he ran from one officer to another, as though he were afraid of being late. He came back to Makeev, bent over, and stood up again. A pile of boots rose up to his ribs.

'Twenty-six,' counted Burdukovski. 'Twenty-seven. And one makes twenty-eight.'

He drew himself up—he was the smallest and the squattest among them all—glanced at the motionless officers, and at Makeev, pale and silent, and burst out laughing.

'And now,' he shouted, 'you sons-of-bitches, take off your tunics!'

Makeev hastened to Ungern's tent. The Baron jumped at the sight of him.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' he said, obviously relieved.

He listened to Makeev's breathless story in silence.

'We've eaten all the flocks and herds,' he said. 'I can scarcely feed the men. I can't go on feeding the shepherds.'

The Baron smiled.

'But, Your Excellency!'

Ungern stared in astonishment at this excited man as he went on babbling nonsense.

'I gave my orders to Burdukovski,' he said. 'What about it?'

Makeev went back to the shepherds. He found them still silent. Clad in ragged shirts and trousers all holes, they were sitting in a circle, cutting up a cow's hide. They proceeded to wrap bits of it round their feet. So they hadn't lost all hope yet.

It was that night that Ungern's officers made up their minds to kill him and beat a retreat.

EVERYTHING was ready. The scouts, the machine-gun section, and two sections of Cossacks were in the hands of the conspirators. The mutiny was to break out simultaneously in both camps, and its victims were designated Ungern, Rezukhin, Burdukovski, and a few other officers.

During the afternoon one of the conspirators paid a visit to Rezukhin's quarters to spy out the land. The general's tent was pitched a short distance from the camp, in a clearing, about a hundred yards from a little stream. It was impossible to make any mistake. The orderly officer had been chosen from among the conspirators. Equipped and armed, the Cossacks slept beside their saddled horses.

The hour had come. The officers made their way across the clearing. In the distance they could see the camp-fire outside the general's tent. Rezukhin was lying beside it. He was not asleep. A dirty pack of cards was spread out on the grass. The general heard nothing; he was immersed in his favourite game, 'Napoleon's Tomb'.

The conspirators reflected that at this same moment, twenty miles away, other officers were on their way to Ungern's tent.

'Who goes there?' challenged the sentry.

'Friends!'

The general paid no attention to the voices. He was thinking out a complicated manoeuvre, with the knave of hearts held in his left hand.

'Halt, or I fire!' shouted the sentry.

The conspirators fired first.

What was happening? With reluctance, Rezukhin tore

himself away from his game. He was too accustomed to shots to get excited. It was just the routine of civil war.

A fountain of sparks sprang up from the fire as it was riddled by bullets. Still clutching the knave of hearts in his left hand, the general discharged his revolver with his right hand and disappeared into the dark.

The officers went back to camp. Orders rang out. The Cossacks mounted. Then silence fell again. The conspirators waited.

Heavy footsteps snapped dead branches. With his hairy chest exposed, and a revolver in his hand, Rezuikhin came forward.

‘What squadron are you?’ he asked the waiting men.

‘The fifth, General.’

‘Where’s the squadron commander?’

‘Present, General,’ replied the officer, without moving.

‘Send a patrol to my quarters at once. I’ve just been attacked by somebody or other.’

‘Very good, General.’

‘Well, what are you waiting for?’

The officer made no reply. It dawned on Rezuikhin that he was still holding the knave of hearts. He felt like throwing it away, but that would spoil his pack. He clutched the greasy card more tightly, and said:

‘I ordered you to send a patrol to my quarters. Do you hear me? Answer me! What’s the matter with you? Have you gone mad? Do you hear me?’

A shot was fired from the ranks. The general dropped. The squadron said nothing.

One of the officers set off at a gallop for Ungern’s camp. Half-way there, he caught sight of Makeev, who was riding towards him.

‘Everything went off all right with us,’ he said. ‘Did you finish off the Baron?’

‘No,’ replied Makeev. ‘No, no, no!’ he repeated, in a shout, and he set off again.

Rezukhin's brigade struck camp and fled eastwards, towards the Selenga, towards Manchuria, towards Semionov

All day long the horses had grazed on the grass in the valley. Now they were to be heard chewing the cud in the dark. Ungern's men drowsed round camp-fires half out. Orders had been given to roll up the tents. The Reds must be somewhere about.

'I wish I were at home in my village,' said a young Cossack, 'standing on the door-step and watching the girls pass

'For my part,' said his neighbour, 'I'd undress, go to bed, and sleep for twenty-four hours.'

'Are you mad?' A corporal stared at him, goggle-eyed. 'What about the Bolsheviks?'

The young Cossack shrugged his shoulders, wearily, indifferently. 'What about the Bolsheviks?'

A gun barked, twice. The sound of a few shots fell from the air. The Bolsheviks? But there was no shouting, there was no sign of an attack, no rockets lit up the valley.

'Stand by your horses, stand by your horses!'

N C O's hurried from one camp-fire to another.

'Stand by your horses! We're getting on the move.'

The men stood up slowly and went off in search of their mounts.

'Stand by your horses! Stand by your horses!'

The grass deadened the sound of hooves. Horsemen made contact with one another in the dark.

'There was firing, wasn't there?'

'But who fired?'

'Somebody did.'

The enemy must have hemmed in the valley. They must be waiting. Was Ungern's division going to counter-attack, or was it going to retreat?

'In column of threes!'

It was going to retreat The squadrons drew up facing south-west For weeks the division had been making its way south-west By now horses and men could make no mistake about their direction

A clank of ironmongery sounded from the depths of the valley The batteries passed along the column the opposite way, with their teams trotting As they passed the squadrons turned about The division had its back to Tibet Without an order being given, without a shot being fired, it set off It simply followed its nose

Makeev galloped up to the column He caught sight of Burdukovski, and rode up to him

‘Where are we going?’ he asked

‘No idea I’m just following the others’

‘Where’s the Baron?’

‘I don’t know’

The artillery, the machine-gun section, and the supply-train were mixed up with the middle of the column Squadrons had ceased to exist There were only mounted armed men, trotting in disorder The valley in front of them showed them the way

Issak bumped into Zabiakin

‘What’s happening?’ he asked

‘We’ve done it’

‘Done what?’ asked Issak Then he realized what Zabiakin meant ‘Where’s the Baron?’

‘Gone to the devil Somewhere out there’

Zabiakin waved his arm vaguely, and went on

‘We mistook his tent We opened fire on those of the orderlies, beside his He came out and shouted We fired at him He beat it He may be wounded, or he may not There’s no knowing’

‘Who’s taken command?’

‘Nobody’

‘But who gave orders to start?’

‘I don’t know’

'Where are we going?'

'Eastwards '

'And what about Rezukhin's brigade?'

'They finished off the general They're marching ahead of us '

The valley curved slightly, at the foot of a hill, and the division came out into the plain. It had been easy to advance so long as there was no choice of direction. But now the night horizon was featureless on all sides. The column came to a standstill. The moon shone on dejected, indifferent faces. Half an hour went by. The column awaited orders. Nobody dismounted. But no orders were forthcoming.

The enemy must be waiting behind the hill. Was the division going to counter-attack or retreat?

Two squadrons and the machine-gun section climbed the hill. It looked like a counter-attack.

Already the officers seemed to be making ready. A voice shouted:

'Burdukovski! The chief of staff wants you.'

'Where is he?' replied Burdukovski.

'Up the hill.'

The moon lit up the top of the hill and the figures of the machine-gunners. The soldiers stared. The chief of staff wasn't up there. Nobody had seen him. He wasn't there. The officer who had said so was lying. But that was his business.

'All right,' said Burdukovski. 'Just wait till I get my horse.'

The hill was quite close. Burdukovski didn't need his horse to go there. He seemed to be lying too. But presumably he knew what he was doing.

'You needn't trouble,' said another voice. Makeev rode up in front of Burdukovski.

The Cossacks stared harder than ever. They heard Makeev say: 'You've got some very fine boots on.'

Burdukovski hurried towards the hill, stumbling over marmot-holes. Makeev followed him on horseback, with a revolver in his hand. The two men disappeared at the foot of the hill. When they appeared again on the summit, they were still in the same order. Burdukovski in front, hurrying as though he were late for an appointment, and Makeev behind him. It was difficult to distinguish details at that distance, but that flashing streak looked like the blade of a sword. Burdukovski dropped.

A squadron swept past at a gallop. The enemy at last! No, the horsemen were riding away. It was the last of the Mongols deserting the division.

Men ran in all directions. Several voices proclaimed 'This time, it's the attack.' But the division as a whole did not stir. It awaited orders. No orders were forthcoming.

Behind the hill, a familiar voice rang out.

'Burdukovski! Atchairov! Zabiakin!'

'K1-1-1-1-in!' echo answered.

That's the Baron, said Makeev to himself. It's all up.

'Burdukovski,' the voice repeated. 'Burdukovski!'

'Sk1-1-1-1' answered echo.

The sound of a galloping horse came out of the darkness.

'Burdukovski!'

'Burdukovski's gone to see the chief of staff,' said a man in the ranks, mockingly.

A grey mare bore down upon the squadrons.

'Atchairov! Burdukovski! Makeev!'

The officers had disappeared. But a dull rumble ran along the ranks. The men were swearing.

'You swine! You cowards! You Communists!' cried Ungern's voice. 'Where do you think you're going? You'll get yourselves killed like rats, you fools!'

Two thousand men said nothing. Two thousand rifles held their fire. The officers had disappeared.

Ungern's grey mare pulled up in front of the Cossacks. A cloud of steaming breath surrounded her nostrils. The moon struck her rider full in the face. It lit up his broad, livid forehead, his prominent cheek-bones, his flat nose, running up between two black holes which were his eyes, his two rows of teeth.

'You sons-of-bitches!' shouted that sneering death's-head of a face. 'Do you want a taste of my whip?'

The men in the ranks still said nothing. Another moment, and they would have swung their horses round obediently, panic-stricken.

'About turn!' ordered Ungern.

A shot rang out. Ungern's horse reared. Carbines went off in a ragged volley. Ungern vanished into the dark. A machine-gun swept the plain.

THE FOREST surrounded Ungern on all sides At first it kept silent, spying on this stranger who rode so madly Ungern blazed a trail for himself furiously, in search of non-existent paths The wall of the forest closed in again behind him The moonlight could not penetrate among the trunks

Sometimes Ungern fancied he caught sight of a clearing He set off at a gallop, but always there was nothing but trees to welcome him with their intertwining branches Finally Ungern dropped the reins and patted his mare on the neck The beast lengthened her stride She seemed to know where she was going The night became less dark, the trees were less dense, and a landscape of mountains made its appearance

A horse neighed in the distance The mare raised her head and sniffed the chilly air Ungern raised his head too The moon had disappeared A sky riddled with red stars bore down upon the earth

The forest swallowed him up again It was still silent Ungern wandered about among the trees, stopped, set off at a trot again, laughed and swore Little by little his movements became slower and more hesitant He dismounted, walked a few steps away, came back to his mare, raised his arm, and laid it on her neck Then his arm dropped He remained motionless He was emptied of any capacity for uttering a sound

Then the forest started speaking on its own account Little gusts of air escaped from hollows in the trees Branches creaked Night birds peopled the air with their

soft flight. The moss opened with a rustle as mushrooms pushed their way up. The first leaves of autumn hovered and fell.

Ungern was alone, irremediably alone. He thought about the legendary Mongol whose whole life went by while he was out hunting. When he came to himself, he found that his hair was white and the soles of his feet were those of an old man. What was the good of being alone if one had nobody to command? Ungern was all alone, at the age of thirty-five.

'We have no friends left but our shadows, and no whips left but our horses' tails.' These words of Genghis Khan's mother came back into his mind.

Genghis, too, had escaped into the forest. He stayed there three days, and then, leading his horse by the bridle, made his way towards the edge of it. But his horse's saddle fell off. Genghis turned round and found that the girth and the breeching were still in position. 'The saddle might slip round even though the girth were not undone,' he said to himself, 'but how could it fall off all by itself while the breeching was still in place? It is heaven itself which has stopped me.' He went back on his tracks and spent three more days in the forest. When he set out again, a big white stone barred his way at the edge of it. 'It is heaven itself which has stopped me,' said Genghis, and he went back on his tracks and waited three more days. Thus he spent nine days without eating. At the end of them, he said to himself, 'Is it possible that I should die like this in ignorance? I had better be gone.' He took the knife which he used for cutting arrows, and leading his horse behind him, left the forest. And the men who were waiting for him seized him and dragged him away.

Ungern had no more friends, no more whip. Friends he had never had, and he had not known how to use his whip. Was it possible that he should die like this in ignorance?

The forest busied itself taking advantage of the last few moments of darkness Ungern got up, took his mare by the bridle, and walked straight in front of him towards the daylight His saddle stayed firmly in place, and no stone barred his way

A group of horsemen were drawn up on the edge of the forest The prophecy was coming true Ungern galloped towards them They fired a shot or two in his direction, and then waited for him in silence

They were Mongols belonging to his division. some of those who had deserted during the night There were four elderly men and one young man When they recognized Ungern, they looked uneasy

Ungern rode up to them

'I forgive you, slaves,' he said, 'but you must obey me'

He sat down on the ground and ordered them to bring him vodka and water As he drank the mixture thirstily, he said to himself that he had been wrong to take Russians into Mongolia They didn't know how to obey But Yellows knew. They had been to a good school.

'Do you know the name of Genghis Khan?' he asked

The Mongols said nothing

'Genghis Khan, the great Khan of the Mongols?'

Ungern persisted

One of the men smiled

'*Arikhi chinuss khanai idi,*' he said

'What does that mean?'

Another Mongol translated

'Vodka was Genghis Khan's drink. It was he who invented it'

'How did he do that?'

'So they say among us,' said the Mongol. 'For my part, I don't know anything about it,' he added, in a deprecating tone of voice

'And is that all you know about Genghis Khan?'

'Yes'

'Ask the others. Don't they know anything more about him?'

'No they don't.'

'What are you by profession?'

'We're shepherds.'

'All right, go to the devil!'

Ungern was tired and sleepy. These men made him sick. He lay down and closed his eyes.

'*Arikhi chinziis khanai idi,*' he repeated.

A rustling in the grass roused him out of his torpor. The youngest of the Mongols had come back. Squatting opposite Ungern, he was staring at him with such intense hatred in his expression that the Baron put his hand to his revolver. But the boy promptly took himself off again.

Ungern wrapped his head in a corner of his robe and went to sleep.

He was awakened by the sound of voices. Through the silk over his face he could not see who the speakers were.

'Look at the fellow!' said a voice. 'But how could anybody sleep as soundly as that?'

'Suppose we have a look at him?' said another voice.

'Watch out! You never know.'

It dawned on Ungern that the voices were talking Russian. With a start, he sat up. His robe slid back, baring his dishevelled hair, his grey, haggard face. One end of his moustache bristled in the air, and the other hung down his chin.

Ungern stared around him. The Mongols had disappeared. Leaning over him were a group of youthful, laughing soldiers. All of them were more or less blond and more or less chubby. Their caps were adorned with red stars with five points.

CENDRARS had disappeared. People said he was ill and away from Paris. I wrote to him and told him I had just finished *Ungern*. I got no reply. His friendly hand must be shaking other hands, perhaps not so friendly.

I was keen about getting him to read my manuscript. I parcelled it up, and attached an explanatory note to it which read something like this:

‘This is not an historical novel. The author has reconstructed a good deal and made up quite a lot. He is left wondering whether it can be called any kind of novel.’

Time went by, and the parcel became covered with dust. In the end, I gave up hope of seeing Cendrars again. On the other hand, I went back to Marie Anne.

Meanwhile she had moved. Her daughter, who could only cry when I set out on Ungern’s track, had learnt to talk. By this time Marie Anne and I were on the friendliest terms, and, if I had ever had a sister, I would have accepted no other than Marie Anne.

She had a kerchief round her head. For a mother, the dimples in her cheeks looked absurdly childish. I did not look at her once while I read her the last few chapters of my manuscript.

‘And is that the end?’ she asked. Her surprised tone of voice took me aback.

‘Yes, if you’ve no objection. If you were in my place, would you add anything?’

‘Well, what became of Ungern after he was captured by the Bolsheviks? I’d like to know.’

‘He was put on trial.’

‘Then why not say so?’

‘I’m short of definite information about his trial, and, for once in a way, I didn’t choose to make anything up.’

‘Don’t you know anything at all?’

‘Yes, I know a bit, and, as I’ve told you, I could make something up. I will, if you like.’

‘I wish you would, my dear. But I must put my daughter to bed at seven o’clock.’

‘I’ll be as quick as I can.’

‘But don’t be too quick.’

‘Well, it was like this,’

Ungern was captured in the month of July, 1921. First he was taken to Troitsko-Savsk, which he had hoped to seize a few weeks earlier. There he was given a preliminary interrogation. He had imagined that the Bolsheviks would kill him on the spot. He was quite prepared for that. Then he said to himself that his enemies wanted to make him suffer as long as possible. He could fully understand that, too.

He was somewhat surprised at the sight of the man who came to interrogate him for the first time. He wasn’t a Jew. His blond beard, his little grey eyes, and his broad cheek-bones betrayed his Siberian birth. He never lost his temper, and never raised his voice.

The Baron would have liked to start a great argument with him. But the man didn’t give him time. In a monotonous, colourless voice, he asked Ungern any number of definite little questions. He wanted to know everything: names, dates, figures. Sometimes he consulted his notes and jotted down a few words in the margin. Then he got up as suddenly as he had come in and went out without saying a word. Afterwards Ungern realized that the bearded man was fully informed about all that had happened. The Reds must have been more numerous in Mongolia than he had imagined.

From Troitsko-Savsk the Baron was taken under escort to Verkhni-Udinsk. He was driven in a carriage through the town, which was bedecked with red flags. For a moment or two Ungern played with the idea of jumping out. He glanced at his guardians. None of them was looking at him. But the street was swarming with soldiers and peasants. The prisoner changed his mind. The passers-by were even more dangerous to him than his escort.

At Verkhni-Udinsk, Ungern was subjected to another interrogation. He had a third at Irkutsk. From there he was taken to the prison in Nobo-Sibirsk, which at that time was still known as Nobo-Nikolaievsk.

In his cell he never once thought about the prison in Dauria. He spent all day squatting in a corner, wrapped in his yellow silk Mongol robe. His fate did not interest him particularly. At the age of thirty-five Genghis Khan had not yet conquered either Asia or Europe. The struggle was simply broken off.

Ungern answered the questions which were put to him wearily, indifferently. The walls of his cell let subdued sounds filter through. Sometimes voices reached his ears from outside. One morning there was singing in the streets. But nothing could rouse Ungern from his torpor.

Time went by. The Baron could not have said whether he had been there for a week or a month. One day he thought it was snowing. He remembered that it was the month of September. The winter would take two good months to confuse the tracks in the forest. But the irregulars had nothing to fear. By this time, in fact, there were no irregulars left.

Ungern scarcely listened when they came and told him that his trial would take place on September 15.

The court-room of the Supreme Court of Siberia was crowded long before the time. Thousands of people were packed on the seats on the floor of the room, in the

galleries, on window-ledges, and thousands more would-be spectators were left outside

Can you see that court-room, Marie Anne? Most of those in it were workers. Abandoning their work, they had come from factories, from building-yards, from railway-workshops, to see the man whose hatred had pursued them for years. There were few of them who had not had a relative or a friend killed by the Whites between the Urals and the Pacific. All of them were familiar with oaths and blows, with the burden of keeping their mouths shut, with all but hopeless dreams of taking their revenge.

With the workers' caps, stained with grease, all over dust, mingled women's kerchiefs, peasants' fur-caps, the helmets of Red soldiers. All these people were of different builds, of different ages, of different occupations. Every one of them had a story behind him, and every one of their stories would have filled a book.

But all their thoughts—thoughts whose starting-point was one memory or another—the memory of a corpse hanging from a telegraph-post, the memory of a shot tearing through the night, the memory of a last kiss, given on tip-toe to reach a rider bending down from his saddle—all their thoughts, all their eyes, converged upon the same point—the little door through which the prisoner would appear at any moment.

This court, this trial, were their own business, just like the work they had just left—just like this town of theirs that they had to rebuild from top to bottom.

While they waited for Ungern's trial to begin, they talked. Little groups gathered in corners round people who, thanks either to their jobs or their experience, were in a position to know about things. Because they could, it was these people's duty to explain things.

'Ungern is a feudalism who has strayed into the twentieth century,' said an old man, wearing gloves cut out of a crimson curtain. 'Bear in mind that he sought military

service, that he sought war, not so much from a taste for adventure as because the Czarist army was one of the most feudal institutions in the Russian Empire'

'If you hit a drunken officer in the face, he was bound either to kill you or to leave the army,' a worker with a moustache explained to a young Red soldier and his neighbour, a little Chinese mechanic. They stared at him in amazement.

'Let's hear what the professor has to say,' said another worker.

'The revolution swept away the survivals of feudalism,' the old man went on. 'Ungern represented the reaction of the nobles, who were just the people that profited by the feudal elements in the Czarist régime. What could he have done, I ask you, even under a bourgeois democratic government?'

He looked round his audience inquiringly, but nobody seemed disposed to answer him.

'At a pinch, he might have gone to the colonies. In fact, it was in Transbaikalia that he served before 1914,' continued the professor, and he waved his left hand in the air. His crimson glove slipped off his shrunk hand. The Chinese hastened to pick it up, but the glove remained suspended in the air. It was attached by a string to the sleeve of the professor's overcoat.

At the other end of the court-room, a group of young students had surrounded a young man little older than themselves.

'You've been in Mongolia, Andrei,' said one of them. 'Tell us something about the Bloody Baron.'

'When I got to Urga' Andrei began.

In his corner, the professor was still talking.

'In Mongolia Ungern went back to the Middle Ages. There he found a feudal régime which was centralized on its spiritual side, though not on its secular side. In Europe, Ungern would have seemed an absurd anachronism. In

Mongolia, this belated Don Quixote was in line with the country's political and economic system. Hence his personal success.'

The old man underlined his last two words with a wave of his hand which set his crimson glove dancing in the air again.

'Who was Don Quixote?' asked the Red soldier, but his neighbours silenced him.

'Ungern,' Andrei explained, 'took advantage in the first place of Mongolia's general tendency to rid itself of any foreign yoke. He played upon the country's religious feeling and its national feeling, which was also a racial feeling. To sum up his support by Japanese imperialism, his support by Mongolian anti-imperialism—such were the sources of Ungern's apparent success.'

'In the East,' remarked a sandy youth, who looked about sixteen or seventeen, 'the question of nationalities is every bit as important as the peasant question.'

'Quite so,' Andrei agreed. 'In Mongolia the higher clergy are pro-Chinese. The princes are partly pro-Chinese, partly pro-Japanese. The peasants have been accustomed for centuries to a state of absolute slavery. There is no industry. Ungern's arrival—'

'... intensified all these latent cross-currents,' interrupted the boy who had spoken just before.

'Quite so,' Andrei agreed again, and this time he studied the boy's face, which was all over freckles. He recalled the day when, in his cell in the monastery at Urga, he had explained the situation to Dorji.

'The Mongol Revolutionary People's Party,' he went on, 'is based upon the "black men"'. Internally, it relies on the peasantry. Externally, it relies on the only available anti-imperialist force: Soviet Russia.

'Tell me,' he asked his neighbour, in a low voice, 'do you know this young fellow with the freckled face?'

'Of course I do,' his neighbour whispered back. 'He's

George Ivanov—Chura Ivanov's brother You remember Shura? ”

‘The man the Whites ’

‘Yes, the man the Whites burnt alive in a locomotive boiler ’

‘I never knew he had a brother,’ said Andrei, still in a whisper As he went on talking, he addressed himself to everybody in general, but he kept his eyes fixed on George

‘In short, Ungern's conquest of Mongolia was conditioned by the aims of Japan, by his abandonment of Transbaikalia, and by his personal class-consciousness It carried the system to which the country had been subjected for centuries to its apogee, and inevitably it provoked a rebellion both against feudalism and against imperialism ’

Andrei's intonation underlined the connexion between the two things

There was a stir in the court-room All eyes turned once more towards the little door through which the judges and the accused would make their appearance Most of those present had never attended a trial before To the older people justice had presented itself in the guise of a police inspector To the younger people it suggested only a dozen bullets or a noose, or, again, the boiler of a locomotive George Ivanov came closer to Andrei Everybody stared at the judges' seats, still unoccupied, with some apprehension The judges would have nothing of the policeman or the Cossack about them—everybody knew that But just what would they be like?

‘What do you do?’ Andrei asked his neighbour, in a low voice.

‘I work in the railway shops,’ replied George, ‘and I'm learning Japanese ’

‘What for?’

‘It might be useful to us, later on ’

The little door opened, and the members of the Supreme Court appeared. Oparin, Gabishev, Kudriavtsev, Guli-

ayer, and Ivan Kravchenko. There was nothing to distinguish them from the general public. In place of them, any five other workers it made no difference which ones—might have been chosen by lot from among the spectators.

The prosecutor, Emelian Yaroslavski, glanced from the judges to the general public. Everywhere he could see nothing but comrades. A score of years of clandestine political activity had taught him to distinguish 'us' from bourgeois, neutrals, or spies at sight.

The professor settled down on a window-ledge. His gloves waved in the air as he explained something in a whisper to the Russian soldier and the Chinese mechanic, who stood beside him.

The little door opened again, and a man made his appearance between two soldiers. He was clad in a long Mongol robe of yellow silk, to which a general's gold-braided epaulets clung like lion's claws. He had bushy hair at the sides of his head, a forehead rendered unduly high by baldness, a broad chin, a drooping moustache, a nose too small and too pinched even for his emaciated face, and, beneath low, jutting eyebrows, staring eyes, almost white, with only little black dots for pupils.

A hush fell on the court-room. Ungern went to his place hemmed in by a dead silence.

'In accordance with the decision of the Revolutionary Committee of Siberia, dated September 12, 1921, Lieutenant-General Baron Ungern von Sternberg, formerly commander of the Asiatic cavalry division, is indicted before the Siberian Revolutionary Court.'

Ungern made a face. He hated his name being mis-handled. 'Ungern von Sternberg.' His family had always called themselves von Ungern-Sternberg.

The crowded court-room listened to the reading of the indictment.

' . . . is indicted before the Siberian Revolutionary

Court on the charges (1) of having lent himself to the annexationist aims of Japan through his attempts to create an Asiatic State and to overthrow the government in Transbaikalia, (2) of having planned to overthrow the Soviet authority with the object of restoring the monarchy in Siberia and the ultimate intention of putting Michael Romanov on the throne, (3) of having brutally murdered great numbers of Russian peasants and workers and Chinese revolutionaries'

Yes, he had ordered executions. Yes, he was a monarchist. But how could they accuse him of having served the purposes of Japan, when his whole idea had been to make use of Japan? On that count he was not guilty.

The trouble was that they judged him by the facts, not by his intentions. He would have to make a long speech. He would have to demonstrate the fundamental difference between the Yellow race and the White race. He would have to recall Genghis Khan. But had they ever heard the name of Genghis, these men who presumed to sit in judgment on him? Still, they had not dared to remove his robe or strip him of his general's epaulets.

Ungern looked round the court-room. At first he could see only a vague mass of people, but, little by little, he began to pick out faces. It was years since he had set eyes on so many Russian faces.

To the right, near the judges' seats, a young Chinese, with a mechanic's cap on the back of his head, and a Red soldier were standing arm in arm. Fundamental difference? The two young fellows had the same half-open mouths, and their two pairs of eyes stared at the accused with equal steadiness. The Baron's eyes and the eyes of the Chinese met. Fundamental difference? Ungern was the first to look away.

In the front row a little old woman was staring at him, a grandmother who had spent her life washing other people's dirty linen. She had been in such a hurry to get

to court that she had not even waited to put on a kerchief, and her hair made a silvery halo round her head. Her eyes were unwavering, her fists were clenched, and her mouth was a thin slit. Her cheeks were a little flushed. Once more Ungern lowered his eyes.

He felt very much alone. But he was used to solitude. For years he had commanded men, and for years he had despised them. The old woman's stare reminded him that it was a long time since anybody had dared to look him straight in the face. Nobody except that Jewish commissar at Dauria, who had talked to him about the theory of . . . What was it called? The theory of the spear-head, was it? A pack of lies!

Ungern's eyes travelled round the court-room. They rested for a moment or two on the freckled face of a very young fellow who was staring at him. What had they in common, all these eyes whose intent stare was almost like a physical weight on his face? He could read some emotion in them, but he had forgotten the name of it. Hatred, was it? Yes, there was that, too, but that wasn't the essential thing.

The Baron lowered his eyes to avoid meeting those other eyes. The eyes of his fellow-men—it was probably the first time he had ever really noticed them—frightened him. What the dickens was that commissar's name?

Was it hatred in all these people's eyes? Ungern recalled the young Mongol who had stared at him just before his last sleep as a free man. His eyes had been full of hatred in its crude state. But here the people's eyes were different. Furtively, as though he were afraid of being caught at it, Ungern scrutinized the faces before him.

He picked out the Red soldier and his Chinese comrade, an old man behind them who was waving an absurd pair of crimson gloves in the air, the freckled boy, the old washerwoman, a railwayman with a moustache, wear-

ing a leather cap Then he lost sight of everything about these various faces but their eyes

They were cold, calm, curious Yes, that was it—calm curiosity Just as though he were a beast belonging to some strange species

A beast which was being exhibited in its wild state Was that why they had left him his robe and his epaulets? But it couldn't be true! All these people must hate him, fear him, marvel at him

With his head held high, Ungern searched eagerly for signs of hatred, in order to feast himself upon it Once more he studied eyes which by now were becoming familiar to him Hatred? These eyes were cold, calm, curious

What the dickens was that commissar's name? Einstein! That was it The name suddenly came to the surface of his mind, and with it came memories of childhood, of women The torture of his freshly cut nails The way they sank into the crimson plush of grandmother's armchair. He would never go to Tibet now He was destined to die in the northern hemisphere They were false, those star-charts of the Mongol lamas Silly of him to try and found an empire with clogged cards against him!

'The accused may smile if he likes,' the prosecutor was saying, 'but he is lying if he claims that he never had any relations with Japan We hold proof to the contrary'

Ungern waved the charge away To be sure, he had been in communication with the Japanese, just as he had corresponded with Chang Tso-lin Genghis Khan, too, had paid court to Van-khan before conquering his kingdom

'But we are not in the twelfth century, and we are not here to judge Genghis Khan'

So the prosecutor had heard of Genghis Khan, after all He could even pronounce his name correctly

'Since, however, the accused is so much attached to the

past—that past which he wanted to restore—let us ask him to tell us about his family, about his ancestors. We shall thus leave it to him to fix his own place in society.’

Yes, Ungern could talk about that all right. Not for the sake of these men (did they even know the names of their own fathers and mothers?), but for his own sake.

At the period when Genghis’s sons and lieutenants were riding across Europe, the Ungerns were already an old family. To an Ungern every war had been a pretext for victory or death. The failures of the family had merely commanded regiments. But as for the others! There was the crusader who was killed under the walls of Jerusalem. There was Jaroslav, who crushed the Tatars. One Ungern was a marshal of Sweden and fought against the Germans and the Russians. Another Ungern was one of Catherine the Great’s generals and defeated the Turks.

Why learn history? One need only be familiar with one’s own genealogy. Ungerns fought for all the great kings: for Gustavus Adolphus, for Ivan the Terrible, for Charles XII, for Peter I. Ungerns fought for them, and they also fought against them. They fought, above all, for themselves, for their own family, which was older than the Romanovs, the Hohenzollerns, or the Hanovers. Ungerns wrought havoc among the Saracens, Ungerns broke the rush of the Tatar hordes, Ungerns conquered the Eastern frontiers with fire and sword.

But it was to other ancestors that the Baron’s heart went out in veneration. Every century had its Ungern who was hated and feared. The sixteenth century had Heinrich the knight-errant. The seventeenth century had Raoul the knight-brigand. The eighteenth century had Wilhelm the Alchemist. The nineteenth century had Peter the Wrecker. The twentieth century had Roman Ungern.

‘For a thousand years,’ the Baron wound up, ‘Ungerns have given other people orders. They have never taken orders from anybody.’

Panoplied with a thousand years of glory, a thousand years of pride, Ungern challenged the gaze of the crowd

The Chinese mechanic leant over and whispered something in the Red soldier's ear, and the two of them looked at the accused with amused smiles. What had that Chinese said to his neighbour? Had he said that his own ancestry went back not one thousand years, but four thousand years? Or had he made fun of this strange beast, with its robe, its epaulets, and its ancestors?

From his place, the prosecutor surveyed the court-room too. Before him he saw workers, peasants, soldiers. A thousand years had gone. The Ungerns gave orders no longer, and never again would they give orders in this land which was witnessing its fourth free harvest. At school children would be taught the pre-history of humanity, but they would find it hard to believe in it.

'Were you in alliance with Semionov?' the prosecutor asked Ungern.

'No,' replied the Baron. 'Semionov was fighting for the Constituent Assembly, and I was fighting for the monarchy. For that matter, I am satisfied that the Constituent Assembly itself would have re-established the Czardom.'

'What makes you think that?'

'I feel it, instinctively. The nobles made monarchy, and monarchy made the world. I refuse to admit working-class authority. How can a man who doesn't keep even a general servant talk about governing? He is incapable of giving orders.'

The old washerwoman had not stirred. Her fists were still clenched, but her lips parted, almost imperceptibly. She had forgotten how to smile. The accused was obviously lost without servants. His own robe would be the better for a good washing.

Yaroslavski went on with his examination of Ungern. With every reply the Baron sank a little deeper into a

sea of blood His answers became more and more curt

To begin with, there was Dauria his searches of trains by night, his punitive expeditions into the forest, his cutting off arms and legs, his putting out eyes, his tearing off nails, his treatment of Jews as delinquents, of workers as criminals, of Communists as sinners

‘Yes, I admit that’

The tide of blood rose to Ungern’s ankles

. . . His rides across Transbaikalia and Mongolia, with corpses serving him for landmarks, with villages set on fire flaming behind him, with sheep and then shepherds with slit throats trampled underfoot, with children’s pitiful little bodies kicking as they hung from branches too low and too weak to bear a man’s weight .

‘It was war’

. His capture of Urga, his massacre of Chinese, of Jews, of Russians, of Mongols

‘They were too Red for my liking’

. . . His executions of officers, of soldiers, his hangings, his bullets, his pyres, his order to ‘exterminate commissars, Communists, and Jews, together with their families’, his attacks on caravans, his payments for requisitions with lead, his recommendation to ‘remember that war feeds on war’

The tide of blood rose to Ungern’s waist It rose to his neck. It went to his head. It sounded the charge at his temples

‘Why did you leave Urga?’

‘The Mongols became less trustworthy than they had been I decided to invade Transbaikalia and persuade the peasants there to revolt But I was taken prisoner’

‘By whom?’

‘Some Mongols betrayed me.’

‘Have you ever asked yourself why those men acted as they did?’

Ungern chose not to remember how that young Mongol had stared at him for the last time just outside the forest. He repeated, doggedly

‘I was betrayed’

Yaroslavski bent forward

‘Do you admit that the end of your campaign was the same as that of all the attempts which have recently been made upon the workers’ authority? Don’t you agree that, of all these attempts to attain the objects you had in view, your attempt was the last?’

The last attempt? Ungern did not answer

He looked back at Harbin in 1918, when victory seemed so sure, so near at hand. He looked back upon Sato’s face, lit up by gleams from the fire, upon the Living Buddha’s black glasses, upon Captain Sudzuki’s red-trimmed cap. ‘It would be wise to think about choosing another spear-head’

Kolchak had got his dose of lead one winter’s night on the ice on the Angara. All Kappel’s officers had brought back from their last march was their leader’s corpse. Annenkov had held out for a long time amid the crags of the Altai Mountains. Every morning he had fired a gun in person towards the Soviet frontier, but in the end the Chinese had interned him. It was all up with Bakitch. His last dispatch to the Russian consul at Urga began ‘Pursued by the Jews and the Communists, I have crossed the frontier’, Rezhukhin had been killed by his own officers. The ataman Kalmikov had disappeared—he would never make old bones in China. Some person or persons unknown had assassinated the ataman Dutov at Sui-Dan. The ataman Semionov had taken to flight. When he came to the end of the gold he had stolen, the Japanese would doubtless find some police job for him. As for Ungern himself . . .

In short, there was nobody left—nobody at all. Ungern caught a glimpse of the ruins of Karakorum. At that time victory had seemed . . .

'When a spear-head goes blunt,' he said, 'one gets rid of it'

'What did you say?' The prosecutor waited for his answer

'Yes,' Ungern agreed, 'mine was the last attempt'

His pride got the upper hand

'Yes,' he said, in a cutting tone of voice, 'I suppose I'm the last survivor'

He stopped listening to the prosecutor. What was the use? Why should he?

A new Mongol Empire had never existed except in his own imagination. Genghis Khan's warriors slept in the plains of Hungary and Russia. Nomads led their flocks from pasturage to pasturage and welcomed Buniat agitators to their tents. The horses of the world's conquerors could not jump obstacles.

It was a fine thing, that Empire of his, stretching from the Volga to the Pacific, from Canton to the Arctic Ocean. The weak did not dare to raise their eyes higher than his ankles, and even the strong did not dare to raise theirs higher than his knees. The ground gave way beneath the weight of him. He sank through seven layers of earth until he came to the alluvial clay. Then he drew himself up to his full height. He bent his bow—a bow to match the size of the steppe. He drew in his chest and his belly. He dug his toes into the clay. His shoulder-blades met. The muscles of his back were taut. Blood burst from his thumb and his forefinger. Then he shot his arrow. The bow twanged, and the arrow sang through the air.

'Stuff and nonsense!' The Hutukhtu was a short-sighted, syphilitic old man, and on the stones of Karakorum lizards warmed themselves in the sun.

'Have you anything more to say?' asked the presiding judge.

'No,' said Ungern. 'I have nothing more to say.'

He stared at his hands, as though they did not belong

to him When he was a child, they were white and plump He had waited impatiently for the day when the bones and the first veins would show up through their childish chubbiness The day had come, and then he had forgotten how impatiently he had awaited it Now he was thirty-five It was a funny thing, a hand Its pores dilated, hair grew on it, lines dug themselves into it They were rather dirty these hands of his 'You ought to smarten yourself up' Yes, it was his grandmother who used to say that But who was talking about his hands now, at this very moment? It was that man with the moustache, the prosecutor 'His hands, his hands' The prosecutor was talking about his blood-stained hands

The judges had retired Presumably they were deliberating about their sentence What was the sense of all these formalities?

The last attempt? It was a piece of cowardice to refuse to think

'I *know* I'm the last survivor After me, the lizards of Karakorum'

The crowd started streaming away from the court-room.

'Good-bye, comrade professor,' said the little Chinese to the old man, 'and thanks so much for your explanations'

'Of course, they were bound to sentence him to be shot,' remarked his friend, the Russian soldier

He went on, briskly

'You must come and talk to us at our regimental club one of these days'

'You asked me just now who was Don Quixote,' said the old professor, fumbling with his gloves 'Well'

The three of them walked along together

The crowd kept on streaming away

'Good-bye, comrade,' said George to Andrei He glanced at Andrei enviously 'I wish I had your chance of doing a spot of secret service work for the revolution'

'Cheerio' replied Andriei 'Come and see me some morning at the District Committee's office'

A nice young fellow, he said to himself A bit romantic, but he'll grow out of that .

'Well, that's really the end, this time,' said Marie Anne

'Yes, that's the end,' said I 'Or, if you like to put it that way, it's only the beginning Ungern was a forerunner'

Talking so much had made me thirsty It must be nearly seven o'clock I lit a cigarette

'Only the beginning?' echoed Marie Anne

I pulled a copy of that day's *Humanité* out of my pocket A cable from Shanghai reported a clash between a Japanese outpost and some frontier guards of the Mongol People's Republic

'The beginning of what?' asked Marie Anne

'I don't know Sooner or later, I suppose, a war between Japan and Soviet Russia'

'Then Ungern was wrong, wasn't he? There won't be any end to it, will there?'

'Yes, there will'

'You mean Soviet Russia will win?'

'I mean there'll be a revolution in Japan'



